

**Learning and Knowledge Management mechanisms during Internationalisation:
A hotel chain development perspective**

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Candidate declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 80,200.

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List of publications

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Dedication

For Shazia

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Abstract

Hotels chains are amongst the most internationalised service sectors. Knowledge management and learning are acknowledged as central to the process of internationalisation not only for the survival of an organisation, but also for the achievement of a competitive advantage. The aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding of how hotel chains learn and manage knowledge during the internationalisation process. The thesis investigates the mechanisms that hotel chains utilise to capture, store, transfer and re-use knowledge when expanding abroad. It also investigates the types of knowledge that are useful during this process and the role of networks in knowledge transfer.

The study draws on critical realism and employs a multiple case study framework to collect data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with senior managers of hotel chain international development teams that were selected using a judgemental non random sampling technique. The resulting data are rich and provide deep insights into the structures and mechanisms that support learning and knowledge management for hotel chains, during internationalisation.

The research findings bring together international business, organisational learning and knowledge management literature, providing an outline of the related learning and knowledge management processes involved during the international expansion of hotel chains. A conceptual model is developed, showing how learning mechanisms function and link together, the central role of the individual, and how knowledge is transferred between the headquarters of the hotel chain and the units abroad. The findings identify the types of knowledge that are useful to the internationalising hotel chain and show the importance of social capital and the knowledge that is stored within networks, personal relationships, and people.

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List of Abbreviations

ACAP – Absorptive Capacity

AMER – North, Central, and South America

EK – Experiential Knowledge

EMEA – Europe, Middle-East, Asia

FDI – Foreign Direct Investment

HQ – Headquarters

KBV – Knowledge Based View

KSA – Knowledge Skills Abilities

KM – Knowledge Management

MNE – Multinational Enterprise

OK – Objective Knowledge

OL – Organisational Learning

OLI – Ownership, Location, Internalisation

SECI – Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, Internalisation

SHU – Sheffield Hallam University

SVP – Senior Vice President

VP – Vice President

Chapter 1: Introduction

Knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge through experiential learning are critical to the success of an organisation's international expansion (Autio et al., 2000; Casillas et al., 2009, 2015; Eriksson et al., 2000; Scott-Kennel & Batenburg, 2012). Theory on the internationalisation process, emphasises the importance of learning and the mechanisms that are involved in managing knowledge: the acquisition, accumulation, storage, transfer and re-application of internationalisation knowledge (Bell & Cooper, 2018; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Sapienza et al., 2006; Zahra et al., 2000). This chapter covers the general background of the thesis and presents the reasons that the knowledge management and learning processes that take place during the internationalisation process of hotel chains are of crucial importance and constitute a field of study that requires further exploration. It also presents the research gap, arguing that there is a need for further research in this field, within a hotel context, concluding with the research question and objectives. The main aim of the thesis, as reflected in the research question, is to provide an understanding of the role and function that the learning and knowledge management mechanisms have within the internationalisation process of hotel chains. This is followed by a set of three objectives, which guide the development of the thesis. The introductory part concludes with an outline of the structure of the present study.

1.1 Background

Knowledge and the acquisition of it, has characterised the current business environment, which is now seen as knowledge driven (Aslam et al., 2022). Using a knowledge-based view (KBV) of the firm, knowledge can be seen as power and the main factor leading to the achievement of a competitive advantage (Costa et al., 2016; Ferreira et al., 2015; Gluckler, 2005; Grant, 1996; Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021). This is the case even more when it comes to the process of internationalisation, where knowledge becomes a matter of survival, success or failure (Aguzzoli et al., 2021; Khojastehpour &

Johns, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2010). In relation to this, the hotel industry and hotel chains in particular, constitute an interesting sector, as from one hand, they are one of the most globalised service-intensive industries within soft-services (Ivanova & Rahimi, 2016), and on the other, they are becoming more and more knowledge and learning dependant, leading the transformation of the sector towards a knowledge-based industry (Almeida et al., 2022; Baytok et al., 2014; Hallin & Marnburg, 2007). They account for approximately 80% of the accommodation services around the world (Hood, 2015) and have an important influence over the rest of the businesses within hospitality (Ivanova & Rahimi, 2016). Knowledge plays an essential role during their internationalisation process (De Correia et al., 2019; Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021), and the acquisition of it, is interrelated with the process of learning (Anderson & Boocock, 2002; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003). Learning depends on formal and informal processes and structures which allow learning to be achieved, and the resulting knowledge to be stored and transferred between groups and members of the organisation (Lundberg, 1995; Senge, 1994). Hotel chains have expanded horizontally and vertically holding huge networks of businesses that introduce innovative practices and technological advances (Ivanova & Rahimi, 2016). The term 'hotel chain' seems to be commonly used when describing hotel companies with more than one unit, without however a specific and clear definition behind it. An exploration of the literature on hotel chain definitions can be found on page 18, but for the purpose of this thesis, the one provided by Ivanova and Rahimi (2016, p. 16) is adopted: "A hotel chain is a group of hotels, or any accommodation establishments, sharing a common brand and similar concept, implementing at least one centralised function, in order to reach a better market position and improve the performance of all properties. The hotel chains utilise equity and/or non-equity modes for their growth and operate on local, regional, national and/or international level".

Internationalisation has been described as a learning process for an organisation (Casillas et al., 2009; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), or a process of accumulating knowledge (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009), as the ability to do so will determine the level of its' growth (Luo, 2002). Knowledge has been identified as having a central role within the process (Brida et al., 2015; Eriksson et al., 2000; Fletcher & Harris; Garcia-Almeida et al., 2020;

Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Hilmersson, 2014; Petersen et al., 2003), as it reduces the risks involved (Leon-Darder et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2010), reduces uncertainty (Andersson, 2004), introduces new expansion opportunities (Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021), and can provide a sustainable competitive advantage to the internationalising organisation (Rodriguez et al., 2010). This knowledge can be found embedded in hotel chain procedures, routines and other organisational tools, hardware and also individuals, within and without the organisation (Almeida et al., 2022; Argote & Ingram, 2000; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Nieves et al., 2014). As hotel chains are classed as 'soft-services', production and consumption must take place simultaneously (Erramilli, 1990; Javalgi et al., 2003). This means that hotel chains have to engage with non-export internationalisation activities when expanding abroad, which may lead to a significant level of service adaptation, and as a result higher costs and more general risks (Erramilli & Rao, 1990; Lindsay et al., 2003). Learning about these new markets therefore, and obtaining knowledge related to the local way of doing things, the market norms, local networks and the general internationalisation process, will help them succeed.

The literature on learning and knowledge within internationalisation has been growing over the years (Scott-Kennel & Batenburg, 2012), yet the role and effect that they have on the internationalisation process, have not been examined in detail (Ball et al., 2008; Bell & Cooper, 2018; Costa et al., 2016; Eriksson et al., 2000; Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020; Mattsson, 2000; Scott-Kennel & Batenburg, 2012; Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021). A starting point to shed more light into the processes of knowledge management and learning within hotel chain internationalisation, is to discuss the main concepts underpinning this phenomenon. Knowledge kept by hotel chain organisations, can be of an explicit form, or tacit, which is gained through experience during internationalisation (Almeida et al., 2022; Blomstermo & Choi, 2003; Fletcher & Harris, 2011; Petersen et al., 2003). Although both types of knowledge can be beneficial to the internationalising business, experiential knowledge is highly regarded, not only because it can significantly reduce international development risks, but also because it can be transferred and used in other contexts, as it is not market specific (Eriksson et al., 2000; Hilmersson, 2014; Madsen, 2005; Petersen et al., 2003; Zahra et al., 2000). Further to this, hospitality, as a service-based industry, presents a high degree of tacit knowledge (Ubeda-Garcia et al.,

2021) and the management of it plays an important role in the way it functions (Chen & Lee, 2017; Cooper, 2006, 2015; Ruhanen & Cooper, 2004). From a learning and knowledge management perspective, knowledge can be acquired through other means as well, such as grafting, which involves acquisitions, mergers and new staff, vicarious learning, which involves observing and imitating other organisations, and finally searching and noticing, which involves scanning the external environment and monitoring performance (Dixon, 1992; Huber, 1991). Further to these, congenital knowledge, or the knowledge that is inherited upon the founding of an organisation, constitutes the starting point upon which knowledge can be accumulated (Huber, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Slater & Narver, 1995), influencing the direction of future learning activities (Driver, 1993; Huber, 1991; Minbaeva et al., 2014). There are several pre-conditions however that can affect the ability of an organisation to transform the learning that has taken place into useful knowledge that can assist it throughout the process of internationalisation. These can range, from the ability to absorb knowledge from both an individual and organisational perspective (Bratianu, 2015), to the level of prior learning that has taken place (Bart & Braziotis, 2017; Minbaeva et al., 2010; Simons, 1995), the richness of the acquired information and its level of coding (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka, 1994; Petersen et al., 2003), the culture, processes and structures that are in place to facilitate the process (Casillas et al., 2015, Fatima & Saba, 2020; Huber, 1991; Lee & Choi, 2022), and the motivation and commitment of management staff as well as individuals within the organisation (Almeida et al., 2022; Baytok et al., 2014; Fatima & Saba, 2020; Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Peterson et al., 2003; Shiue et al., 2010). Although traditionally learning within firms has been viewed from an organisational perspective (Andersson, 2000), the role of the individual within the process, as well as the importance of an individual's commitment, beliefs and intention have been identified as critical (Casillas et al., 2015; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka, 1994), as the learning that has been captured by an individual, will need to be extracted and transferred to an organisational level, and the opposite (Huber, 1991). The transference of knowledge from an individual level to an organisational one, is essential, as it will feed into the organisational knowledge base, thus making it available on a firm level, rather than allowing it to remain within the individual with the risk of losing it (Nieves et al., 2014). This is even more important for hotel chains, that are

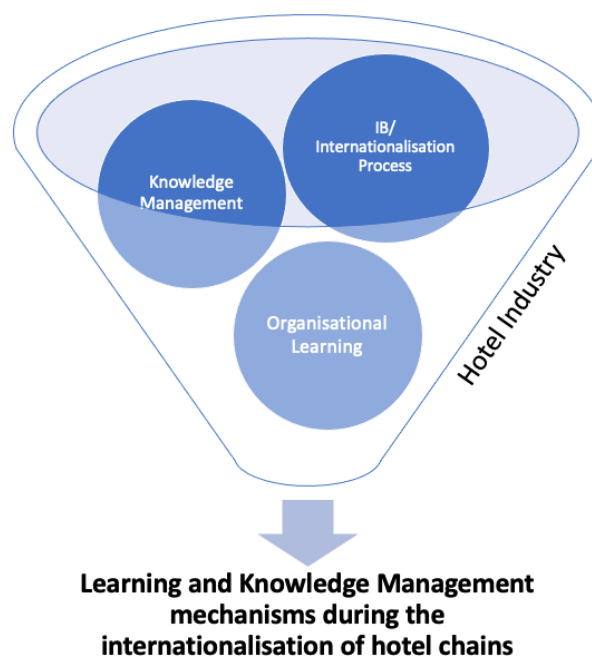
characterised by high levels of staff turnover (Argote, 1999; Tanova & Holtom, 2008; Nieves et al., 2014; Yang, 2019). As a result, although individual learning can be viewed as a distinct activity, it is closely linked and is interdependent to the organisational one (Bhatt, 2002; Stalk, 1998). This idea has been encapsulated in the SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2007) which shows that learning is taking place on multiple levels within an organisation, individual, group, organisational and inter-organisational, and can be viewed as a spiral relationship or interplay, between explicit and tacit knowledge, resulting in knowledge creation. It can be applied to an internationalisation context (Kantola & Hautala, 2008), showing the importance of social capital within the process (Han, 2006; Korsakiene et al., 2017; Ozdemir, 2017; Panarina, 2021).

From a learning perspective, all these mechanisms are reflected in the model devised by Huber (1991), explaining how organisations learn, and is explained in chapter 2.5.2 on organisational learning (page 43). In assessing the question on the influence, role and function of knowledge and learning within the internationalisation process of hotel chains, this model provides a way of categorising these mechanisms and has been used extensively in research on knowledge and learning within the internationalisation process (Barney & Tong, 2004; Bengtsson 2004; Casillas et al., 2010; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Ghaderi et al., 2021; Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020; Pu & Soh, 2018; Tsang, 2020). Huber (1991) identified four main mechanisms that function during the learning process of an organisation. These are: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organisational memory. Using these categories to explore previous research within the internationalisation of hotel chains, some studies have looked into the acquisition of knowledge (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2016; Ingram & Baum, 2001), the storing of it (Engstrom et al., 2003), its transfer (Aizpurua et al., 2011; Aksu & Ozdemir, 2005; Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Ingram & Baum, 2001; Kyriakidou & Gore, 2005; Yang & Wan, 2004; Scott & Ding, 2008) and its re-application (Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz, 2020). These studies however, do not cover the learning process and its mechanisms during internationalisation from a holistic perspective, but focus on its individual elements instead, and thus not reflecting it in its entirety, which would be beneficial from both a theoretical and practical standpoint. Knowledge management and learning practices are essential aspects of an organisations' strategy (Crespo et al.,

2014; Ferreira et al., 2015; Styhre, 2004; Wiig, 1997), capable of providing a sustainable competitive advantage, and directly impacting performance and business growth during internationalisation (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Hilmersson, 2014; Luo, 2002) and should be reflected, throughout a hotel chain’s global strategy, vision and operations (Snyman & Kruger, 2004; Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021). Thus, a holistic overview of these mechanisms, will provide a deeper understanding.

The thesis therefore explores the knowledge and learning mechanisms that are in action during the internationalisation process of hotel chains. It seeks to provide a richer understanding of these, their role and also to identify the underlying structures that support them. This involves the exploration of three distinct bodies of literature: international business and the internationalisation process, organisational learning and knowledge management, as well as hotel management (Figure 1.1). The research gap is further analysed in the next chapter.

Figure 1.1: Bodies of literature used in the thesis



Source: Author

1.2 Research gap and research questions

Hotel internationalisation has evolved as a growing field of study, seeking to gain insights into its processes and management (Brida et al., 2015). Research in this field, however, has been growing at slow rates. Early research has focused more on the modes of entry (Littlejohn et al., 2007) and the separate aspects of hotel activities (Ivanova et al., 2016). Authors have been critical of the small number of countries used as context in studies, and also of the small publicly quoted firms explored (Knight, 1999; Littlejohn et al., 2007; Olsen & Roper, 1998). This was the starting point for the emergence of a research interest into knowledge management practices and learning during the internationalisation, in relation to the hotel industry. Ivanova et al. (2016) support that although research into hotel chains, as part of hospitality and services, has been growing, it has not been given the importance that it deserves in the literature, it is highly fragmented and seems to focus on separate aspects of hotel activities. They further argue that hotel chains are usually presented as single case studies and they have not grown beyond that. Schuckert (2020), through a systematic literature review for the last two decades, looked at internationalisation studies within hospitality in general, expanding on the work of Littlejohn et al. (2007). He concludes that research is limited and small in comparison to similar internationalisation studies using other contexts and industries. The internationalisation of hotel chains therefore constitutes an interesting field for research, and the thesis aims to add to this general body of literature, by exploring the field of learning and knowledge management during this process.

When it comes to learning and knowledge during internationalisation, research on how this knowledge is generated and where, how it is stored, developed and transferred during the development of foreign operations in the service industries is underdeveloped (Casillas et al., 2009; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020; Lindsay et al., 2003; Olivera, 2000). Considering the literature from a service industry perspective, there are calls for more empirical research in order to understand how organisations store, accumulate and make knowledge available (Aguzzoli et al., 2021; Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020; Olivera, 2000). Fletcher and Harris (2012) agree and explain that it is important to understand where useful knowledge comes from and how internationalising firms assimilate the knowledge that

they gain from internal and external sources. Lindsay et al. (2003) further argue that there seems to be little distinction made between the different types of service organisations, such as between educational or financial services or telecommunications. They call for further research into the behavioural aspects of service firms during internationalisation within a knowledge transfer context. They also state that knowledge transfer between headquarters (HQ) and foreign subsidiaries within services needs considerably more investigation. Garcia-Almeida and Yu (2015), in their study on knowledge transfer during international expansion within hotels firms, support the need for more qualitative methods and case studies in order to gain a deeper and richer insight. Similarly, Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz (2020) call for more qualitative research into the re-use of knowledge during the expansion of service organisations and hotel chains in particular. Lindsay et al. (2003) finally argue that there is a need for further exploration of the role and influence of the individual, as a unit of analysis, within knowledge transfer and learning of service based organisations. According to the same authors, this has practical industry implications too, as a further exploration of the above could lead to a better understanding of the knowledge flows within a service firm, employee motivation, and the role of individuals and their relationship in the knowledge transfer processes. This thesis is aiming to address these calls for further qualitative studies into learning and knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains (Brock & Yaniv, 2007; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz, 2020; Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Ingram & Baum, 1997; Lindsay, et. al., 2003; Littlejohn et al., 2007; Pinho & Prange, 2016).

Research on knowledge management and learning during internationalisation, has identified different types of knowledge that relate to international expansion: market, institutional, business, technological, cultural, network and experiential or internationalisation knowledge, while some authors combine some of these under different characterisations (Dau, 2015; Eriksson et al., 1997; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Mejri & Umamoto, 2010). Fletcher and Harris (2012) however, argued that more research is needed to find out where knowledge that is useful to the internationalising company, comes from. There is a general growing research interest in the different types of useful internationalisation knowledge and

how these can be combined (Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020). Ubeda-Garcia et al. (2021) have identified two main types of useful knowledge that relate to hotel chain internationalisation: market knowledge and experiential knowledge. The literature on hotel chain internationalisation focuses on knowledge that supports operations and relates to customers, competitors, services and operational processes (Hallin & Marnburg, 2008; Yang & Wan, 2004) and highlights the importance of experiential knowledge (Altinay, & Wang, 2006; Brookes, & Altinay; 2017; Gross et al., 2017; Eriksson et al., 2015; Michailova & Wilson, 2008; Pla-Barber et al., 2014; Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021). The literature on hotel chain general knowledge and learning management, focuses on operational elements that are useful from a service perspective (Bouncken, 2002; Hallin & Marnburg, 2008). Therefore, research into the type of knowledge that is useful to hotel chains during the internationalisation process, will help shed some light and also extend the current understanding.

One of the sources of knowledge for the internationalising firm, is that of networks. Their importance has been identified in early studies on internationalisation (Eriksson et al., 1997; Johanson & Mattsson, 1988) and research on their role and influence has been developing (Almeida & Santos, 2022; Autio et al., 2010; Dau, 2015; De Correia et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2010; Idris & Saridakis, 2018; Kryeziu et al., 2022; Rosenbaum, 2017). From a hotel chain perspective, De Correia et al. (2019) argue that networks are crucial in the first steps during internationalisation. They constitute an invaluable source of knowledge, information and market opportunities (Kryeziu et al., 2022; Lindstrand & Hanell, 2017) and can take many forms, such as formal, informal, social and involve a range of different organisational stakeholders (Bell & Cooper, 2015; Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020; Idris & Saridakis, 2018). Brida et al. (2015) emphasised the importance of networks within the internationalisation process of hotel chains and argued that this field remains underdeveloped. Although the general literature on internationalisation knowledge stemming from networks has highlighted the importance of it as a source, authors debate as to whether this knowledge can translate directly into learning or experience (Bridal et al., 2014; Chetty & Eriksson, 1998; Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Holm et al., 1996; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Welch & Welch 1996). Further to this, there seems to be a gap in empirical research when it comes to the role interpersonal networks as

sources of internationalisation knowledge, developed on an individual personal level (Idris & Saridakis, 2018; Zhang et al., 2016). Interpersonal networks and relationships emerged as a key finding, through the pilot study employed as part of the methodology for this thesis. The pilot study, aimed to test the research tool, methodology and suitability of the population. Although understanding the role of networks and their role in transferring knowledge was not one of the initial objectives for this study, it emerged as an interesting and significant finding, and was included as a result, as a third research objective. More details on the pilot study can be found on page 117.

As a result of the above analysis, the research question for the thesis is:

“How do hotel chains learn and manage knowledge during the internationalisation process”

followed by the aim and the research objectives which can be found below and are discussed in chapter 1.3.

1.3 Aims and objectives

Aim:

To understand how hotel chains learn and manage knowledge during the internationalisation process.

Objectives:

- *To understand the mechanisms that hotel chains utilise to capture, store, share/transfer and re-use knowledge obtained during foreign operations.*
- *To identify the types of knowledge that are useful for hotel chains during internationalisation.*
- *To understand the role of networks within the knowledge transfer process during internationalisation.*

1.4 Research approach overview

Based on the nature of the research question, and the aim and objectives, a qualitative research approach was followed. The thesis adapts a critical realist standpoint to explore and explain the mechanisms of learning and knowledge management during the internationalisation process of hotel chains, as well as the underlying structures that facilitate them. It utilises a case study research strategy, involving in-depth semi-structured interviews and hotel chain internal documentation. The population consists of members of international development teams, and included heads of international development, senior vice presidents, vice presidents, directors and managers, working for hotel chains that operate within the continent of Europe and are directly involved with the knowledge management and learning mechanisms in place. Data was collected from interviewing 16 participants. The interviews with senior hotel chains development management produced rich data that provided deep insights into the mechanisms and structures supporting the learning of hotel chains during internationalisation. The results were thematically analysed, and together with secondary organisational data, addressed the research question and objectives.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is developed through six chapters:

Chapter 1: It introduces the literature related to the subject and provides the background of the phenomenon of learning and managing knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains, while explaining the research gaps that have been identified. This is followed by a presentation of the research question and the research objectives, as the starting point to this research. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the present study.

Chapter 2: This section consists of the literature review, covering theoretical concepts and research from the fields of: international business, services industries, knowledge management, organisational learning and the hotel industry. It starts with an introduction to the hotel industry and the hotel chain sector in general. It then discusses

the internationalisation process as it relates to services, covering the key theories and models around international expansion, moving onto knowledge and its role within the process. It reviews organisational learning models and links these to the internationalisation process. Finally, the concepts of absorptive capacity, experiential knowledge, knowledge transfer and flows are discussed, and the chapter concludes with the presentation of a conceptual framework encapsulating the above concepts, from the research question perspective.

Chapter 3: It presents the methodological approach of the present thesis. It starts by introducing the main parameters of the study and presenting critical realism as the adopted philosophical standpoint. The methodological limitations, bias and reflexivity are discussed, followed by a presentation of the research design, defining the case, justifying the use of case study research and interviews for data collection and explaining the population and sample. The chapter finally presents the process of handling and thematically analysing the collected data as well as the process of evaluating the findings and writing up.

Chapter 4: It presents the case findings as they emerged from the thematic analysis as well as the analysis of the secondary data. It starts with an overview of the participant profiles, their roles and experience, followed by an analysis of the administrative structure of hotel chains. It moves into presenting the main themes, starting with the hotel chain knowledge and learning mechanisms functioning during the internationalisation process. It covers thematically the acquisition of knowledge, its storage, transfer, and re-use. It then presents the findings on the types of knowledge that are most useful to the internationalising hotel chain closing with the importance of experiential knowledge and the role of the individual in the process.

Chapter 5: This chapter discusses the findings of the research in the light of the conceptual framework and is structured in the order that the research objectives have been presented. It begins with a discussion on the administrative structure of hotel chain international development departments and moves onto the actual mechanisms and structures the hotel chains utilise, in order to acquire knowledge during the

internationalisation process. This is followed by a discussion on the storage of it, the transfer and re-use, leading to the next part, on the types of knowledge most useful to the internationalising hotel chain. The chapter continues with a discussion on experiential knowledge, its embeddedness and the role of the individual. It finally discusses the role of networks in facilitating the transfer of knowledge and presents the updated conceptual framework, reflecting all key findings.

Chapter 6: This chapter addresses the research question as well as the research objectives that were presented in chapter 1. It continues with the presentation of the key theoretical contributions, explaining in detail the insights they offer in relation to published research. The managerial implications follow, providing contributions to practice that would benefit the management of international development teams. The chapter closes with a discussion on the general limitations of the present thesis and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The introduction chapter presents an analysis of the background theories and previous research, introducing the main concepts that are utilised in the fields of internationalisation, organisational learning and knowledge management, in order to understand the process and mechanisms of learning and managing knowledge within the internationalisation process of hotel chains. After critically analysing the theories of internationalisation within the context of services and hotel chains in particular, all internationalisation models are examined from the perspective of knowledge. The factors affecting expansion choice are reviewed, and the international entry modes are investigated. Having established the role of knowledge and learning within the process of internationalisation, the characteristics and types of knowledge are then analysed, with particular reference to knowledge management and knowledge transfer. The chapter ends with a conclusion, presenting the gaps identified in the literature and a proposed research framework.

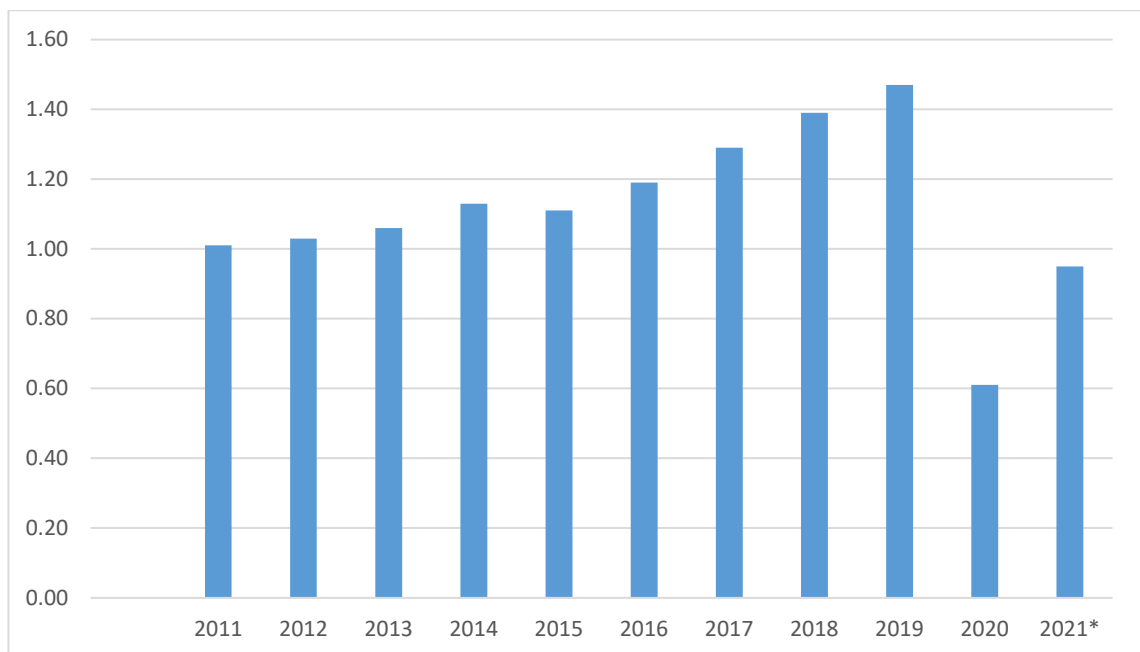
The literature review was synthesised using resources available via social science databases and other general Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) library links and Google Scholar. From there, a snowballing technique was utilised, by pursuing references of references (Denyer et al., 2008), in order to research different topics in depth and uncover interesting and relative leads (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005). The topics explored initially were the internationalisation of services and hotel chains, organisational learning and knowledge management in general and within internationalisation in particular. During the development of the review of the literature, the need to explore other themes emerged. Although these were closely related to the main topic, their relevance and importance were not clear from the start. The additional themes explored were: knowledge creation, knowledge transfer as well

as knowledge flows, which are closely related to knowledge management (King, 2009; Korsakiene, 2017; Ozdemir, 2017; Senge et al., 1994).

2.2 Background: Internationalisation and the hotel industry

The hotel industry is one of the most globalised, service-intensive sectors (Assaf et al., 2016) and a key part within the 'soft services' sector, with a market size worth of \$1.47 trillion in 2019 (Statista, 2022). Although the market size dropped to \$610 billion in 2020 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it is forecasted to again increase up to \$950 billion (figure 2.1).

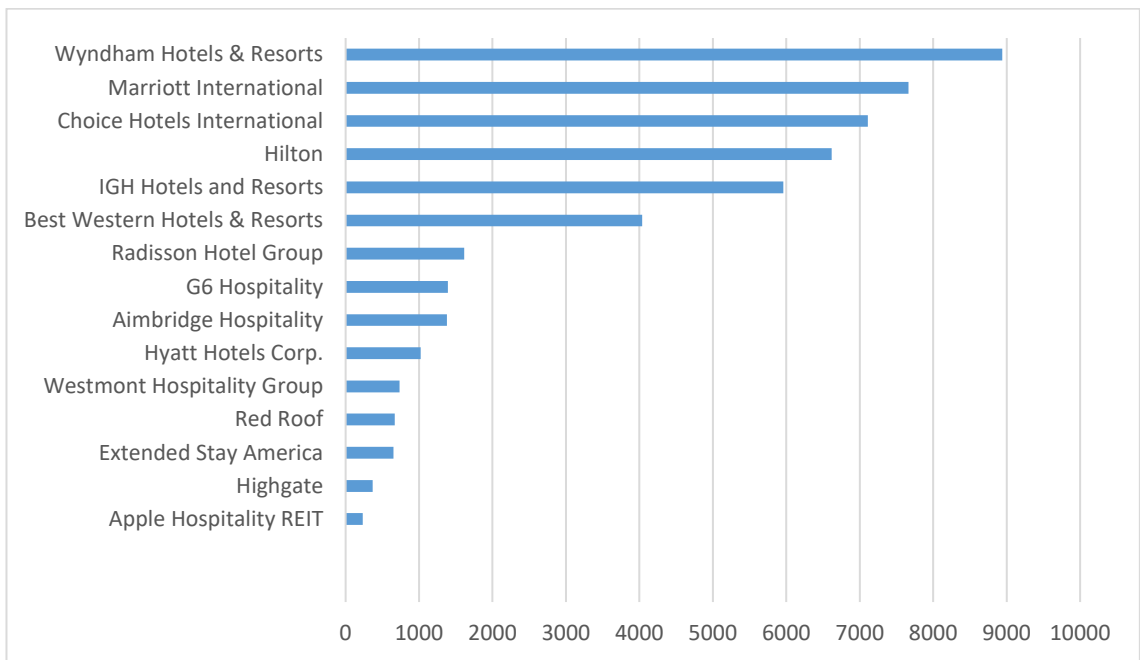
Figure 2.1: Market size of the hotel industry worldwide from 2011 to 2020, with a forecast for 2021 (in trillion U.S. dollars)



Source: Statista (2022)

As an industry, hotels have seen a massive development since 1946, when Intercontinental became the first hotel company to expand internationally (Littlejohn & Roper, 1991). In 2021, Wyndham was leading the ranking of the top hotel chains by number of properties around the world, with 8,941 units (Figure 2.2), followed by Marriott International with 7,662 units, Choice Hotels International with 7,111 units and Hilton fourth with 6,619 units (Statista, 2022).

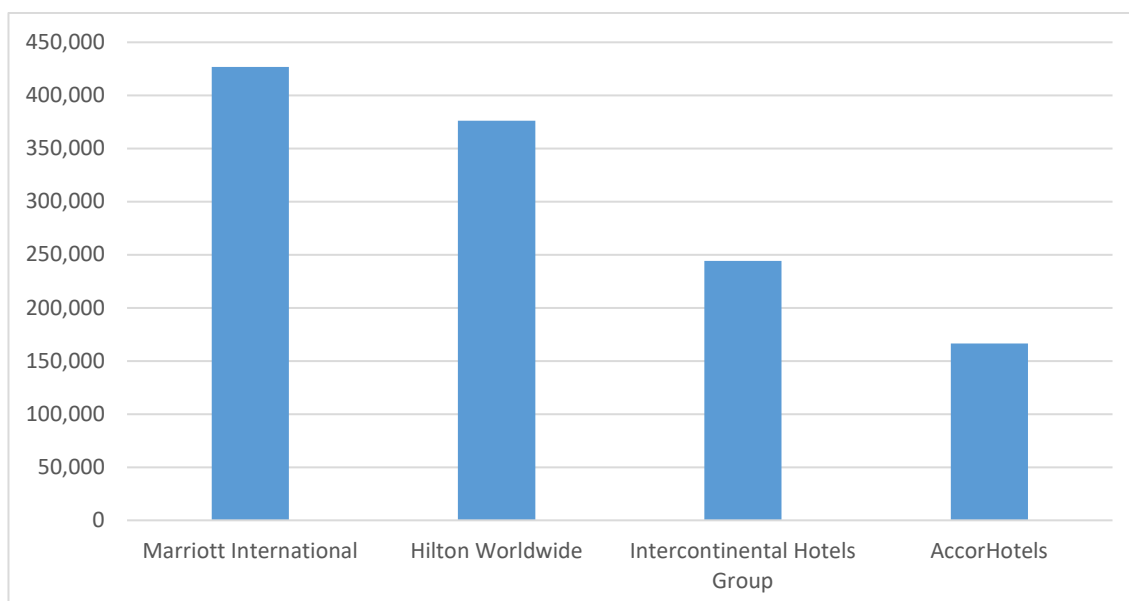
Figure 2.2: Leading hotel companies worldwide 2021, by number of properties



Source: Statista 2022

The trend of international expansion continued with Hilton's 70s ethnocentric 'cookie cutter' approach to internationalisation, to reach the opposite end with the 'act globally think locally' motto, taking the hotel industry through several different stages of international development before reaching its current form (Alexander & Lockwood, 1996; Johnson & Vanetti, 2005; Littlejohn et al., 2007; McLaughlin & Fitzsimmons, 1996; Nickson, 1998;). These stages transformed the hotel industry, from being domestic to a rapidly expanded standardised industry all over the world, reaching finally the current stage which is a compromise between standardisation and adaptation (Nickson, 1998), known as the 'middle-of-the-road' approach (Sousa & Lengler, 2009). In Q4 2021, the number of hotel chain rooms in the construction pipeline worldwide ranking, Marriott was leading with 426,744 hotel rooms, followed by Hilton Worldwide, with 376,251 hotel rooms (Figure 2.3). According to Lock (2022), these two hotel brands are also the largest hotel groups in the world in terms of revenue.

Figure 2.3: Number of rooms in the pipeline worldwide 2021, by company



Source: Statista (2022)

The standardisation, in the way hotel chains internationalise and take their operations abroad, came as a result of the influence of the American model, in terms of ownership and providing a 'best practice' framework for the industry (Go & Pine, 1995; Nickson, 1998; Sousa & Lengler, 2009). The expansion of hotel operations into other countries was the result of a combination of a desire for profit, growth and development, the pressure from saturated domestic markets, as well as the incentives offered by foreign governments (Altinay & Roper, 2001; Johnson & Vanetti, 2007). Studies of internationalisation within the service sector have traversed many different schools of thought and the literature that has been developed is rich and complex (Johnson & Vanetti, 2005). According to Littlejohn et al. (2007) however, research on hotel internationalisation is fragmented. The same authors also highlighted the importance of single industry studies under the light of new and wider research methods and theories.

Moving forwards from the traditional Swiss model of ownership and the concept of the 'hotelier' (Nickson, 1998), the notable phases in the internationalisation history of hotel chains start with the intercontinental in the 40's. This was followed by an emphasis on standardisation and a homogenous view of the markets, which allowed for an ethnocentric approach to develop (Crawford-Welch, 1992). From the 90's onwards, the emphasis turned to customisation and the multi-tier brand development (Alexander &

Lockwood, 1996; Go & Pine, 1995; Levitt, 1993; Nickson 1998). This change seems to have been influenced by the European style of development, which enriched the American standardised model, bringing in a bigger appreciation of the value of adaptation and the influence of culture and locality (Go & Pine, 1995; Nickson, 1998).

There have been several different efforts by authors to define hotel chains. These have all focused on the different characteristics that hotel chains have, such as their multi-unit nature, ranging from two or more hotel units (Peng, 2004) to three or more properties (Bhatia, 2006), and to a minimum of eight properties (STR, n.d.). The geographical distribution of these properties is another characteristic that has been highlighted by the different definitions (Brookes, 2007; Ivanova, 2014) and also the fact that there is a range of entry modes that could be utilised by a hotel chain (Bhatia; 2006; Contractor & Kundu, 1998; Ivanova, 2014; Peng, 2004;). Another characteristic that has been included in these definitions for hotel chains is the maintenance of the same level of quality among the properties, as well as the central management, communication, administration, information and knowledge sharing (Brookes, 2007; Ivanova & Rahimi, 2016). Establishing operations in different markets is also another characteristic that has been covered in definitions that explored the international profile of them (Ivanova & Rahimi, 2016; Jones, 1999). Hotel chains have to manage their properties, employees and guests in multicultural environments, in a manner that allows them to preserve the core character of the brand (Jones, 1999). Further to this, hotel chains need to have a common brand, product and service technology, differentiating their profile from that of their competitors, supporting for customer loyalty to be built (Brookes, 2007; Ivanova, 2014; Ivanova & Rahimi, 2016). As a result of the above, a hotel chain can be defined as: “a group of hotels, or any accommodation establishments, sharing a common brand and similar concept, implementing at least one centralised function, in order to reach a better market position and improve the performance of all properties. The hotel chains utilise equity and/or non-equity modes for their growth and operate on local, regional, national and/ international level” (Ivanova & Rahimi, 2016, p. 16). This definition is complete and incorporates all the previous elements from past definition, and therefore will be adopted for the purposes of this thesis.

Hotel chains as part of the services industry, can be characterised as ‘soft-services’ together with other sectors, such as banking and retail distribution (Erramilli, 1990). Due to their ‘soft’ nature therefore, production and consumption occurs at the same time (Leon-Darder et al., 2011), and cannot be exported, requiring a major local presence. Other characteristics of the hotel industry are the high degree of customer-supplier interaction and the wide range of modes of entry available (Pla-Barber et al., 2011). Additionally, hotel chains are people-led and tend to have several different layers of decision makers within their structures, making the role of these individuals critical within the internationalisation process, both in terms of contribution of knowledge and strategic choices (Altinay & Roper, 2001). As the literature within the hotel sector in terms of internationalisation research is underdeveloped (Brida et al., 2015; Ivanova et al., 2016; Littlejohn et al., 2007; Schuckert, 2020), it is crucial to develop a review of literature on services for this thesis, starting with an analysis of its fundamental qualities and how these are to be considered within the field of business internationalisation.

2.3 Internationalisation and service firms

The process of internationalisation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It is driven by an increasingly globalising economy, advances in technology, the need for the acquisition of strategic capabilities and enhanced market share, and the quest for competitive advantage (Glückler, 2005). ‘Internationalisation’ as a term is ambiguous (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003), with the name itself denoting the act of becoming international. Hitt et al. (1994, p. 298) defined internationalisation as “expanding across country borders into geographic locations”. Calof and Beamish (1995, p. 116) later on, defined it as “the process of adapting firms’ operations (strategy, structure, resources, etc.) to international environments”, a preferred definition according to Chetty and Campbell-Hunt (2003), as it includes the notion of de-internationalising or intentional reduction of international exposure (Turner & Gardiner, 2007) and therefore provides a more holistic view. Finally, in an effort to highlight the increasing understanding of the importance of knowledge within the internationalisation process, Khojastehpour and Johns (2014, p.2) defined it as: “entering an international market through the adaptation of the organization’s processes, transfer of knowledge and opportunities to reach a new

market". Internationalisation is associated with an increasing activity across borders (Khojastehpour & Johns, 2014). The study and research of the internationalisation process of firms has historically moved from a macro level to a more defined international firm level and the multinational enterprise (MNE) (Dunning, 1993; Morgan & Katsikeas, 1997), and it is often also called 'the economic approach' (Khojastehpour & Johns, 2014). One of the earlier efforts to understand internationalisation came from Hymer (1976), who described it using an ethnocentric perspective, viewing foreign business activity as an extension of the HQ basis. From the 60s onwards, several theories and models have been developed in an effort to understand the internationalisation process and explain it (Johnson & Vanetti, 2005). These were originally developed within the literature for the manufacturing industries, and later were adapted and applied to the service industries (Dunning & McQueen, 1981; Glückler, 2005). The application and exploration of internationalisation theory within services however, has been inadequate and slow (Erramilli, 1990; Roberts, 1999). It took several years before research into the internationalisation of services expanded, but up to 2003 addressing the issue was low (Cavusgil & Naor, 1987; Javalgi et al., 2003). In general, there has been an equal amount of research when it comes to empirical and theoretical studies (Knight, 1999) with a growing emphasis on empirical research coming through later on (Bryson, 2001).

According to Lamb and Liesch (2002), the internationalisation process reflects the development of the business abroad, over time, with the critical decisions being on the market, the timing and the mode of entry. The internationalisation of services displays even more critical points that need to be considered (Ooi & Richardson, 2019). Based on the service characteristics, these points are: the need for personal contact between the service provider and the customer; the impact of reputation; the need for a continuous relationship between the service provider and the customer; the reliance on human resources; the information intensity; and the need for cultural considerations (Roberts, 1999).

While in the past the differences between products and services were distinct, some authors argue that things are changing and that when it comes to internationalising, there is a blurring between the two (De Backer et al., 2015). Bryson (2007) claims that

manufacturing businesses have transformed into providing partially or exclusively services as well, and that services from their side have started mass producing service products, rather than the traditional adapted and tailored experiences.

Services have also grown beyond expectations to become a global and dynamic driving force in the markets (Leon-Darder et al., 2011). Services can be distinguished between 'soft services' and 'hard services'. 'Hard services' are those that production and consumption of the service can be decoupled, while 'soft services' are those that production and consumption has to occur simultaneously (Erramilli, 1990; Javalgi et al., 2003; Kotler, 1991; Ooi & Richardson, 2019). 'Soft services' display the full characteristics that distinguish them from products: intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity and perishability (Cicic et al., 2002; Nicoulaud, 1989). This distinction places restrictions on the way services can internationalise. While 'hard services' can export their services, such as engineering and computing, 'soft services' have to engage with non-export internationalisation processes when expanding, such as healthcare, fast food and hotels. As services have to be adapted in a much more complex scale than products, there is an initial heavy involvement from the mother company in order to support the implementation, as well as any necessary adaptations (Erramilli, 1990; Lindsay et al., 2003; Ooi & Richardson, 2019). The present research focuses on the internationalisation process of hotel chains.

2.4 Internationalisation process

The motivation to internationalise varies from firm to firm and industry to industry. According to Hollensen (2007), the primary goal of an internationalising firm is profit. Lin (2012) highlighted the opportunities provided for value creation through access to new resources, foreign stakeholders, new institutions and emphasised the possibility to obtain unique knowledge. Dunning and Lundan (2008) identified four main strategic motives when it comes to expanding abroad, related to the nature of the business and its objectives: seeking natural resources; new markets; efficiency; and capabilities. Hollensen (2007) further provided a list of motives for international expansion, distinguishing them into proactive and reactive aspects. The proactive motives include

profit and growth goals, managerial urge, technology competence/ unique product, foreign market opportunities, economies of scale and tax benefits. The reactive motives can be competitive pressure, saturated domestic market, excess capacity, unsolicited foreign orders, the extension of sales of seasonal products, and the proximity to international customers. Similarly, De Correia et al. (2019) explained that the internal stimuli are based on marketing, operations and relational competencies, while the external ones, on the identification of market opportunities, based on institutional and confidential information, manager-privileged knowledge and formal and informal contacts. The same authors, suggest however that internationalisation is a dynamic process that involves mechanisms that are difficult to understand clearly and identify where one stimuli or step ends and another begins.

In an effort to understand the process of internationalisation, several theories and models were developed. As the manufacturing industry however, predated the expansion and development of services and the formal hotel industry, manufacturing business internationalisation theories and models were applied to the service sector (Dunning & McQueen 1981; Grönroos, 1999). Boddewyn et al. (1986) first argued that the existing theories and models on the internationalisation of the manufacturing sector covered satisfactorily service multinationals as well. The same view was also supported by other authors later on, claiming that there is no need for separate models and theories to explain the internationalisation of services (Buckley et al., 1992; Li & Guisinger, 1992). These models and theories in general however, have been the subject of severe criticism over the years, in terms of their effectiveness and compatibility with the service sector. The main elements of this criticism have been: the level of applicability of these models onto services, their theoretical underpinning, the fact that they are too general (Sullivan & Bauerschmidt, 1990) and do not look into the complexity of business activities and behaviour (Morgan & Katsikeas, 1997), such as the commitment to internationalisation and the effect of business relationship networks (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). Several authors have also argued that services are unique and therefore require new models to explain them (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990; Knight, 1999; O'Farrell et al., 1998). In regards to the level of applicability, many authors suggest that the inseparability of production and consumption for services is the main

internationalisation issues and claim that any form of export entry is impossible for businesses involved in services (Sharma & Johanson, 1987; Erramilli, 1990). Therefore, 'soft services' such as the hotel industry, have to rely on non-export models of entry, requiring a local presence or a locally based acting representative of the service firm (Grönroos, 1999; Malhotra, 2003; Ooi & Richardson, 2019).

There are different entry modes for services firms. Erramilli (1990), based on Weinstein's work (1977), categorised them into: 'client-following' (following their clients abroad) and 'market-seeking' (targeting foreign clients). Grönroos (1999) later on, taking into consideration technological developments, added another category called 'electronic marketing mode' (targeting both in domestic and international markets from the home-country). He also explained that these are not mutually exclusive. In the choice of entry mode, the level of customisation and the costs involved seem to have an impact (Erramilli, 1990), especially for the service sector, as businesses that offer standardised services are less willing to do any adaptations (Erramilli & Rao, 1990).

Cicic et al. (1999) place hotels within the 'hard services' category, due to the capital involved when expanding into foreign markets. Both perspectives that view hotels as 'hard' or 'soft' services are however correct, as the presence in foreign markets can involve considerable sources and capital or minimal costs, depending on the mode of entry used. According to Root (1987, p. 5), entry mode can be defined as "an institutional arrangement that makes possible the entry of a company's products, technology, human skills, management or other resources into a foreign country" (as cited in Erramilli, 1990, p. 50). Erramilli (1990) argues that the choice of entry mode is one of the most crucial decisions a firm need to take, when internationalising. He further categorised the modes of entry into exporting, contractual methods and foreign direct investment (FDI). The modes of entry and their role within the internationalisation process are analysed through the review of internationalisation theory below.

2.4.1 Internationalisation theory

The establishment chain model by Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) was one of the earliest efforts to categorize the steps that a business undertakes towards internationalisation. The concept that a firm gradually intensifies activities in foreign markets constituted the basis for further development of the idea that led to the creation of complex theories such as the Uppsala model and the Eclectic theory. The first attempt to generate a theoretical model of internationalisation within hospitality was made by Dunning (1981) with the development of the eclectic paradigm, which was then followed by an extensive study into the hotel industry by Dunning and McQueen (1982). Based on these, several other theories were developed in order to complete gaps left by these early efforts to apply manufacturing theories to the service sector. Andersen (1993) in an effort to categorize all models, divided them into the so-called Uppsala internationalisation models (U-models) (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975) and the innovation-related internationalisation models (I-models) (Bilkey & Tesar, 1977; Cavusgil, 1980; Madsen & Servais, 1997). What is common in all of these theories is the fact that they are all based on two main factors: knowledge and commitment. Most authors agree that both U-models and I-models confirm that the fundamental elements within the internationalisation process of a business are: how much knowledge the firm has, especially experiential knowledge; and commitment or uncertainty on the decision to internationalise (Andersen, 1993; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Morgan & Katsikeas, 1997). According to Brennan and Garvey (2009), knowledge and experiential knowledge in particular, obtained through exposure to international markets, has been one of the most important factors within all internationalisation models to date.

Both of the U-Models and I-Models are often referred to as the 'stage' or 'behavioural' theories and models (Khojastehpour & Johns, 2014; Madsen & Servais, 1997; Whitelock, 2002), as they both describe the process of internationalisation as being gradual and incremental (Uner et al., 2013). This has started to shift however in recent years as the 'international new ventures' (McDougall et al., 1994) or 'born global' firm phenomenon started to develop (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004). Starting from MNE research (Morgan &

Katsikeas, 1997), internationalisation theory dealt with FDI at a later stage, and from there developed further on to the role of knowledge and networks within the internationalisation process (Hollensen, 2007). An analysis of the internationalisation models follows, in an effort to understand the role of knowledge within them, and their general application to the hotel industry.

Heckscher et al. (1991) in an effort to analyse world trade by expanding classical theory, explained how output can be increased through production specialisation. Looking into the source of competitive advantage, they supported that the differences in the endowments from country to country related to labour, land and capital and would have an impact on the efficiency in producing goods. Therefore, each country would export goods, based on the resources that it is abundant in (Ivanova et al., 2016).

Penrose's monumental work in 1959, used a cost-based perspective to explain that the business interested in foreign expansion, need to have a compensating advantage that will help cope with the cost of 'foreignness' (Hymer, 1976). Her work, also known as 'the Penrosian' tradition, was also the first to identify the importance of knowledge as a medium, reducing the effects of uncertainty and risk, and taking advantage of all possible market opportunities (Penrose, 1959).

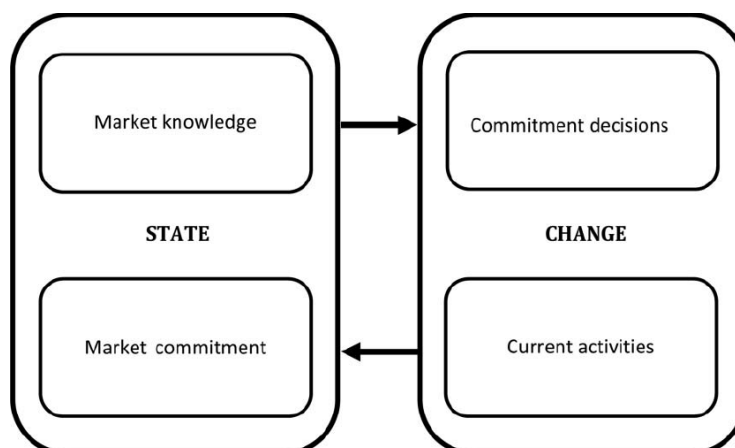
Vernon's (1966) product lifecycle hypothesis (PLC), in an effort to explain international trade and investment, argued that products and services experience cycles. The theory explains how these products and services are initially born in developed countries, and then are exported to less developed countries (market-seeking FDI), taking advantage of lower costs (cost-oriented FDI) (Segerstrom et al., 1990). The concept of economies of scale is important to this concept, and standardisation is the main drive, meaning that any adaptations would be disadvantageous. The countries that offer lower start up, production, raw material and labour costs, are usually less developed countries and ideal for foreign expansion (Hollensen, 2007). Technological advancements, culture, educational level, government effect and other factors can also play a role in the determining of comparative-advantage based trade. This took Hecksher and Ohlin's theory further, supporting that trade will be more active between countries with

similarities (Stonehouse et al., 2009). PLC has been applied successfully within service industries, explaining the evolution of services. The PLC has been useful as an illustrative guide to this type of trade in manufactured goods and has also been successful in explaining the evolution of services.

The transaction-cost approach (TCA) suggests that the internationalising firm that uses licencing when expanding to foreign markets will prefer to internalise transactions through a direct investment, and not license its capability (Buckley & Casson, 1985). The theory supports that the internationalising firm, will choose to perform internally activities that it can undertake at a lower cost and at the same time, taking advantage of the market. It is closely linked to the 'internalisation perspective' as they both are putting an emphasis on the minimisation of transaction costs (Hollensen, 2007) and the levels of 'friction' between the seller (internationalising firm) and the buyer (Williamson, 1975). The internalisation activities of the firm focus on the ownership and control of the local operations, while the externalisation ones, on local agents and distributors. Both approaches define and affect the internationalising firm's mode of entry. There have been various criticisms on the transaction-cost theory, focusing on the opportunistic human nature approach that it adapts (Ghoshal & Moran, 1996), the exclusion of 'internal' transaction costs (Hollensen, 2007), the appropriateness of the TCA theory to SMEs (Christensen & Lindmark, 1993), and the overstatement of the transaction cost, ignoring the importance of production cost (Williamson, 1985 as cited in Hollensen, 2007, p. 61). Service industries respond differently from manufacturing industries to TCA stimuli, due to their own distinguishing characteristics (Erramilli & Rao, 1993). More specifically, Rindfleisch and Heide (1997) identified three attributes of transactions that affect the understanding of transaction cost: environmental and behavioural uncertainty as well as asset specificity. Different researchers suggested that TCA theory may have to be modified to suit the service industries (Erramilli & Rao, 1993); or simply the service industries would choose a different international entry mode, according to their needs and transaction cost implications, based on the three attributes of transaction cost perceptions (Brouthers & Brouthers, 2003).

The 'stages' concept (figure 2.4), which originated at the Uppsala School, suggests a sequential and incremental pattern when entering successive markets abroad. This pattern also follows an increasing commitment to each of those markets (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975). The model supports that the commitment to expand to foreign markets will increase as the firm's experiential knowledge increases (Hollensesn, 2001; Uner et al., 2013). From the Uppsala perspective the lack of knowledge is considered as one of the most important obstacles in internationalising. By expanding first to neighbouring countries that are well-known, firms develop their experiential knowledge around them, and this confidence supports them to expand further, continuing to seek knowledge (Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975). International expansion demands general knowledge as well as market-specific knowledge, which can only be gained through experience in the market (Hollensen, 2007). Johanson and Vahlne (1990) explained that the model therefore suggests a direct relation between market knowledge and market commitment. The 'state' aspects are affected by the 'change' aspects, and vice versa, and can be seen as causal cycles. They further supported that experience developed in one market, may be able to also be applied to any specific market with similar conditions. The Uppsala model has received various criticisms. According to Sharma and Johanson (1987), the model might not be valid for service industries. Their study showed that while in the manufacturing industries internationalisation entails a long-term commitment to a foreign market which is based on the incrementally increasing market knowledge and use of resources, it might not be the case for the service industries which might withdraw at the end of their assignment.

Figure 2.4: The Uppsala model of internationalisation



Source: Silva et al. (2012)

Dunning's 'eclectic theory' and the three distinct sets of advantages framework: ownership, locational and internalisation (OLI), explain how a firm can internationalise (Dunning, 1981). Dunning explains how a firm is more likely to proceed with international expansion to a foreign market, once the three conditions have been satisfied. The ownership advantages can refer to the firm's possessions, such as superior technology, or transaction type advantages, such as cheap labour (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990). Locational advantages refer to the ability of the firm to transfer ownership specific advantages across to foreign markets, instead of exploiting the advantage by selling it. Locational advantages may be distinguished to structural and transactional (Dunning, 1988). Dunning's eclectic theory was the first in-depth research into the internationalisation of the hotel industry, and the particular focus was due to the growing foreign involvement of hotels and the particulars around control of assets (Dunning & McQueen, 1981). According to Dunning and McQueen (1981), it is normally assumed that internalisation advantages can only be achieved through owning equity capital share, that would be enough to allow 'de jure' control over resource allocation. According to their research, this does not appear to be the case for hotels, as these advantages are achieved through some form of contract. Within their study they further support the importance of market-specific knowledge, as well as experiential knowledge from similar markets that can be re-applied. Experiential knowledge can provide the competitive edge to a hotel firm, entering foreign markets easier than their domestic rivals. The eclectic theory also highlights 'knowledge' as a key element within the internationalisation process, especially within the sets of advantages: access to knowledge and thorough knowledge of the host market (Dunning, 1980).

The role of networks within the internationalisation process has been identified by several researchers, which have also emphasised the growing importance of them (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004; Chetty & Wilson, 2003; Johanson & Vahlne, 1992; Michailova & Nechayeva, 2014; Ojala, 2009; Tortoriello et al., 2012). They can be defined as links between organisations and individuals in the industrial world (Brida et al., 2015). Networks are constructed through relationships belonging to formal or informal mechanisms, resources, business activities (Michailova & Nechayeva, 2014; Ojala, 2009;

Tortoriello et al., 2012; Welch & Wilkinson, 1999) and involve knowledge, resources, monetary earnings and also risks (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2015). The network model and approach suggest that when analysing international businesses, other actors in the international environment need to be taken into consideration. Markets are viewed as networks of relationships or ties, which are connected to each other (Granovetter, 1985). The individual business depends on resources that are under the control of others (Hollensen, 2007), and the relationships that an international business has within a domestic network might be also utilised to connect to different networks within other markets or regions (Johanson & Mattson, 1988). These relationships are dynamic and flexible and can change, reflecting the everchanging nature of the business environment. Business network relationships are kept together by technical, economic, legal and personal ties and can be crucial in building links to other networks in markets abroad. Hollensen (2007) suggests that business networks emerge when the participating actors can have strong gains within them, and when rapid changes are taking place within markets. Internationalisation is achieved through the creation of relationships in market networks that are new to the company, through the establishment of relationship in these networks and through linking to networks in other markets (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Ruzzier et al., 2006). According to Khojastehpour and Johns (2014), these network relationships offer the internationalising organisation unique opportunities for learning and also for creating trust and supporting commitment. Coviello and Munro (1997) further suggest that the choice of entry mode can be heavily influenced by the firms' network partners. As a business internationalises, the number and strength of these network relationships increases (Chetty & Wilson, 2003). Network relationships can be distinguished in 'weak ties' and 'strong ties'. 'Strong ties' are the relationships through the formal and hierarchical structure of a firm, friends and business partners. 'Weak ties' are relationships with acquaintances, business contacts, etc. (Hansen, 1999). Although these network relationships can provide an important source of diverse internationalisation knowledge, most research highlights the importance of 'weak ties' in the process of internationalisation and knowledge acquisition. According to Bratianu (2015), 'weak ties' are the networks that can facilitate the acquisition of internationalisation knowledge and the tacit aspect of it in particular. Networks within the internationalisation process can be further distinguished in social

and strategic (Chetty & Wilson, 2003). While social networks comprise of relationships with friends and colleagues, strategic networks comprise of relationships with customers, partners, suppliers and competitors (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988, 2015). Strategic networks can be further categorised into vertical and horizontal. Vertical networks comprise of relationships with customers, suppliers and other partners and horizontal networks, comprise of relationships with competitors. Vertical networks can help develop access in international markets, while horizontal networks can support the collaboration of domestic competitors in dealing with international markets (Chetty & Wilson, 2003). All these different types of networks are enabling the expanding firm to gain a large amount of knowledge quickly and at a low cost (Madhok, 1997).

The stages or behavioural models of internationalisation have been the subject to severe criticism, due to their lack of explanatory power and their short-sightedness, as they are too deterministic and of limited value (Andersen, 1993; Turnbull, 1987). Some authors have argued that as these theories have been dependant on the concept of 'psychic distance', with the increasing homogeneity of the markets, global communications and transportation infrastructures have become less relevant (Bell, 1995). The criticism on these theories, has provided a rise in interest on the 'network' approaches to internationalisation. Andersen (1993) has supported that research needs to focus more on longitudinal settings.

A 'Born Global' firm is a business organisation that engages in international activities from the moment of their foundation (Burgel & Murray, 2000; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). The internationalisation process of Born Globals differs from the firm behaviours that have been described and theorised upon in the past. While the accumulation of knowledge, and tacit knowledge in particular, has been central to the models examined above, Born Globals seem to heavily rely on networks that are mainly of a 'weak tie' nature, which provide all the knowledge required to work internationally (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). While the international knowledge acquired by founders, owners, managers and other staff of a Born Global firm play a central role in its internationalisation and knowledge acquisition, according to the literature, networks are equally important (Nordman & Melen, 2008). The Born Global way of trading seems

to favour partnerships, experimentation and exploration, in order to compensate for the limited knowledge and possible resource disadvantage (March, 1991). From a service industry perspective, service Born Globals seem to have substantial differences in pace, patterns, and strategies from manufacturing firms (Chadee & Mattsson, 1998). Under the light of the rise in on-line service provision as well as the increasing blurring of the boundaries between products and services, there has been a lot of criticism as to whether 'stage' theories are applicable to all service firm types (Bell et al., 2001).

The analysis of the above models and frameworks: process, network models and Born Globals has shown the important role of knowledge within all efforts to trade internationally. With the growing recognition of the importance of knowledge within the internationalisation process by researchers, Casillas et al. (2009) approached knowledge-based models and learning process models from a perspective that highlights knowledge. This helped them to organise them into three general groups: theories that stem from the sequential models and treat knowledge from a 'stages' perspective, international entrepreneurship models that emphasise the importance of knowledge and finally integrative knowledge-based theories that use the perspective of organisational learning (OL).

As seen above, the literature on knowledge within the internationalisation process of firms is rich and supports the central role of it (Hadley & Wilson, 2003). When it comes to modes of entry specifically, the 'manufacturing versus services' criticism equally applies, focusing on the applicability and appropriateness of the theories (Chang & Rosenzweig, 2001; Kim & Hwang, 1992). According to Contractor and Kundu (1998), there is a wide range of modes of entry to choose from, offering different degrees of ownership and control, as well as non-equity agreements and cooperative forms. A major source of uncertainty that would affect the need for control of the operation and a less 'risky' mode of entry, are the cultural differences between the country where the company HQ are located, and the country that it is expanding to (Erramilli & Rao 1990; Leon-Darder et al., 2011; Malhotra, 2003). Further to this, Kogut and Singh (1988) support that the more the cultural differences, the more the adaptation costs. This is where the knowledge of the host country plays a crucial role, and in particular market

knowledge which includes an understanding of the societal norms and cultural aspects. Leon-Darder et al. (2011) concluded that for culturally distant markets, hotel chains tend to adopt modes of entry that offer high control over the operation. The next chapter explores the modes of entry available to hotel chains and their influence on the organisational learning and knowledge management processes.

2.4.2 Modes of international entry

The internationalisation of the service industry and the soft-services sector in particular, implies the presence and provision of services in a new foreign market (Blomstermo et al., 2006; Moskelenko et al., 2021). Hotel chains have a wide range of possible modes of entry (Pla-Barber et al., 2011). These possible ways of entering a market abroad have different levels of ownership and control (Brookes & Roper, 2011; Hill et al., 1990). Control has to do with the ability of the hotel chain to influence the operation (Contractor & Kundu, 1998) and therefore can be high or low, depending on the resource commitments that the chosen mode of entry requires (Blomstermo et al., 2006). In relation to resource and investment commitments, Pla-Barber et al. (2011) categorises the modes of entry available to the hotel industry into three sets: 1) those that require direct investment and provide overall control of the operations; 2) those that entail direct investment, but the control of the operations is shared; 3) those that do not require any monetary contribution, such as management contracts and franchising. Modes of entry can also be seen as equity based or non-equity based (Erramilli et al., 2002). Although hotel chains in general tend to expand through the use of non-equity modes of entry such as franchising, management contracts and licensing, they may however adopt a mixed approach, utilising equity ones, adjusting their strategy according to the need of the different markets and the risks involved (Rhou & Singel, 2016). The choice of mode of entry has to do with the knowledge that the expanding business has of the market abroad (Erramilli & Rao, 1990). According to Johanson and Vahlne (1977) there is a direct relationship between the level of knowledge that an international market a firm has, and the number of resources that it would be willing to commit to it. This lack of knowledge creates uncertainty and increases risks for the internationalising business (Aharoni, 1966). The modes of entry

available to a business are several and each one of them provides different ways of accessing new market knowledge (Ranft & Marsh, 2008). Analysing the modes of entry available to hotel chains from a knowledge transfer perspective will provide a better understanding of their influence on the way that they manage knowledge and learning during international expansion. According to Pla-Barber et al. (2014) the modes of entry available to hotel chains are: management contracts, franchising, acquisitions, joint ventures and greenfield projects. These are analysed further below, starting with an explanation of strategic alliances.

A way of entering and competing in the international hospitality arena is to build an alliance network with a partner, such as a competitor, a supplier or other organisational operating in different sectors, combining strengths and creating competitive advantage (Chathoth & Olsen, 2003). Strategic alliances are different types of agreements, involving two or more partners, aiming to collaboratively pursue common objectives, co-developing services and addressing issues that are complex and difficult to resolved by one side only (Koskey, 2013; Shah, 2012). Alliances can formulate on an equity or non-equity basis (Chathoth & Olsen, 2003). They were developed as a response to the rapid changes, uncertainty, and general pressures of the external environment (Al Khattab, 2012; Russo & Cesarani, 2017) and can be further classified into two types: horizontal and vertical (Adober, 2011). Horizontal alliances refer to partnerships between hotels, collaborating through the formation of chains, or other similar alliances, such as the global hotel alliance (GHA) (Salama & Mohammad, 2022), while vertical alliances refer to partnerships between hotels and other types of organisations, such as airlines and travel agents (Lee & Kim, 2009). A joint venture is an alliance based on equity, when two or more organisations co-create a new organisational entity, jointly owning it and actively participating in the decision-making processes involved (Chathoth & Olsen 2003; Harrigan, 1985). Non equity alliances are agreements that involve co-operation between the participating sides, without the creation of a new organisation, such as licensing or franchising (Chathoth & Olsen, 2003). Knowledge transfer is a key factor for satisfactory international joint venture performance and alliances in general (He et al., 2021; Rotsios et al., 2018; Toylan et al., 2020). According to Chathoth and Olsen (2003), the basis for the formation of an alliance is the sharing of resources,

leading to a superior competitive position. Knowledge sharing is an important part of strategic alliances, and partner selection is crucial as compatibility will positively affect knowledge transfer (Krammer, 2018; Ozdemir et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2017). Alliances often require the partnering organisations to share knowledge in order to establish a common knowledge base, which will support joint exploration for learning and innovation (Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2004; Toylan et al., 2020). According to the knowledge-based view of the alliances, their formation aims to support the productivity of all collaborating partners' knowledge usage through integration of knowledge (Capaldo & Petruzzelli, 2014; Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2004). According to Toylan et al. (2020), there are four different ways of co-creating and sharing knowledge within an alliance, on individual, group, organisational and inter-organisational levels. These ways are seen as processes of combining tacit and explicit knowledge between the allied parties, with the aim of creating new and improved knowledge: tacit to tacit, tacit to explicit, explicit to tacit and explicit to explicit (Bolisani & Scarso, 1999; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Okumus, 2013). For these processes to take place however, several different challenges have to be dealt with first (Salama & Mohammad, 2022; Toylan et al., 2020). According to Al Khattab (2012), these are: lack of trust, lack of coordination between the allied parties, lack of goals and objectives, performance risks, cultural distance and lack of alliance experience. Khamseh and Jolly (2008) have distinguished the factors influencing knowledge transfer in alliances into four broad categories: the type of alliance, the type of the knowledge being transferred, the ACAP of the partners involved and their reciprocal behaviour. The different types of possible collaborations and partnerships for hotel chains are analysed below.

An international consortium is non-equity mode of entry (Ivanova & Ivanov, 2014). It is a network of hotels that unite their resources to create corporate management services, including purchasing, human resource management practices and advertising, in order to achieve economies of scale, access broader international markets and learn from other members (Almeida et al., 2019; Ayazlar, 2016; Roper, 1995). According to Ayazlar (2016), the benefits of consortia membership range from increased visibility and revenues, to general support in all areas of hotel management. Litteljohn (1982) states that consortia achieve their alliance goals by setting centralised consortia management

offices, financed through the membership fees of the member hotels. Although member hotels would be exposed to new sources of knowledge, the absorption of it depends on factors such as the organisational routines which will facilitate this process (Almeida et al., 2019; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Weick, 1991) and the different locational needs of the members (Ayazlar, 2016). The concept of hotel consortia has developed over time, from focusing exclusively on marketing activities, to more broad services, similar to those that franchise agreements offer (Ghosh, 1999).

Leasing is another non-equity mode of entry for hotel chains, as it allows for control of the operation, without capital investment (de Sousa et al., 2016). It involves a property being leased for a period of time by a hotel company, in order to provide accommodation and other related services in exchange for an annual fee (Vallen & Vallen, 2003). Lease contracts usually tend to be based on a long-term period (DeRoos, 2002) and can be compared to management contracts as they have similar relations from an agency perspective (de Sousa et al., 2016). A management contract is an agreement between the internationalising hotel chain and the owner of a hotel (Turner et al., 2016). It gives control of the operation to the hotel chain, including the selection of the management, implementing operational procedures and systems, as well as human resource policies (Pla-Barber et al., 2011; Moskalenko et al., 2021), in return for a fee (Young et al., 1989). Although the owner is assuming the full economic risk of this agreement and the hotel chain is only accountable for the operation (Schlup, 2004), they must act in the owner's best interest (Renard & Motley, 2003). As this is a non-equity mode of entry and therefore carries low financial risks for the hotel chain, it allows for rapid expansion (DeRoos, 2011). From a learning and knowledge management perspective, this mode of entry allows the hotel chain to directly tap into local knowledge (Schlup, 2004). A hotel chain can establish clear communication flows between the units and HQs, as it maintains control of the operation (Turner et al., 2016), however these can be disrupted by the end of the contractual agreement or by restrictions in terms of the ownership of specific information, such as guest data (Schlup, 2004; Turner et al., 2016).

Franchising is a contractual legal agreement, in which the franchisor provides the franchisee with trademarks, support and the general brand know how (Young et al., 1989) over a specified time period and a certain place, in exchange for franchise fees and other ongoing payments such as royalties and promotions (Elango & Fried, 1997 in Wang & Altinay, 2008; Iddy & Alon, 2019). Franchising agreements allow franchisees to modify some elements of the service that are appropriate to the new market, while benefiting from a standardised core structure (Nair et al., 2018; Sashi & Karuppur, 2001). A strength of franchising as a mode of entry, is that the hotel chain has an opportunity to learn from the local owners' market understanding, as franchised operations become the grounds for new service experimentation and testing (Hoy, 2008). Franchising relationships therefore can facilitate the transfer of knowledge on local market conditions and also hotel guest preferences, supporting innovation and network growth (Brookes & Altinay, 2016; Weaven et al., 2014). Weaven et al. (2014) further argue that franchisors with a high learning orientation can benefit by utilising knowledge non only from franchisees, but also other external sources that may be part of the franchise network, such as suppliers and customers, gaining both explicit and tacit knowledge. Franchisors have the opportunity to create an atmosphere of trust, supporting the transfer of knowledge from the individual franchisees to the HQs (Lusch & Brown, 1996), and using this common knowledge base, transfer back knowledge on operational and strategic choices that will benefit them (Weaven et al., 2014). Sorenson and Sorensen (2001) based on the idea of standardisation and adaptation within franchise agreements argue that there are two kinds of learning available through the particular mode of entry: exploratory and exploitative. Exploratory learning supports the development of new routines that support adaptations to new markets and better responses to cultural distance issues, while exploitative learning feeds in an incremental manner into existing routines and structures, supporting hotel chains in achieving standardisation and ensuring franchisees are well integrated into the wider chain (Wang & Altinay, 2008). The learning process of hotel chains in franchise agreements starts at the partner selection stage and according to Wang and Altinay (2008), it is extremely important to balance exploitative and exploratory learning at this stage, as it leads to better chain performance. Iddy and Alon (2019) agree, explaining that knowledge sharing between the two sides in franchise agreements require them to be collaborators rather than

competitors. Apart from the need for a collaborative relationship, there are other factors that can influence knowledge transfer in franchises, such as trust and strength of social relationships between them, distance, ACAP, transfer mechanisms, psychic distance, differences in norms, language and business practices and also the nature of knowledge (Altinay & Wang, 2006; Brookes, 2014; Brookes & Altinay, 2016; Cumberland, 2012; Iddy & Alon, 2019; Khan, 2016).

Hotel chains use management contracts and franchising agreements as modes of entry, utilising existing knowledge through the transfer of non-market specific know-how into international locations (Rugman & Verbeke, 2001). According to Pla-Barber et al. (2014), this means that both management contracts and franchising allow for limited learning due to the weak interface relationship nature that hotel chains have with local firms. They also argue that other modes of entry, such as acquisitions and joint ventures, utilise the entire knowledge base of the local firms, while greenfield projects allow for the combination of local employees and existing hotel chain staff, which can result in complementary learning.

Wholly owned subsidiaries would be classed under the 'equity' modes of entry, requiring significant investment from the side of the hotel chain and means that the operations abroad are fully owned (Leon-Darder et al., 2011). They can be distinguished into greenfield investments and acquisitions (Young et al., 1989). While greenfield investments would take place utilising the existing knowledge based and sources of the expanding business, acquisitions would also provide access to new ones (Huber, 1991; Madhok, 1997). One of the reasons for acquiring another business has been to gain direct access to their knowledge pool (Bresman et al., 1999; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). The knowledge base of the acquired firm will be less duplicative in comparison to that of a greenfield unit (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000).

The success or failure of knowledge transfer between the two sides in an acquisition, depends on the creation and development of a cooperative relationship (Berry, 1983; Bresman et al., 1999). The task of transferring and utilising knowledge through acquisitions is a difficult task and often the process of integrating the acquired units fails

(Bresman et al., 1999; Haspespagh & Jemison, 1991). According to Husted and Michailova (2002), individuals are inherently hostile to knowledge sharing and with acquisitions often being unwanted, uncertain and stressful events, employees of the acquired unit might be unwilling to engage with knowledge transfer processes. Tapping into the knowledge stock of an acquired organisation thus might not be a straightforward process and depends on different factors, such as communication, number of meeting and general contact, the ability to articulate knowledge, culture, time elapsed and the size of the acquired unit (Bresman et al., 1999; Haspespagh & Jemison, 1991; Sarala & Sumelius, 2005). According to Sarala and Sumelius (2005), acquired organisations transfer more knowledge than greenfield subsidiaries to other units and the HQs of the acquiring organisation. Foss and Pedersen (2002) added that acquired subsidiaries engaged in more outward knowledge transfer than their greenfield counterparts. There are several different factors however that influence the level, type and quality of the knowledge that is being transferred through these two modes of entry, such as relationships which tend to be in place between greenfield units and HQs but not in newly acquired units (Sarala & Sumelius, 2005).

The above analysis has shown that the different modes of entry available to hotel chains, offer different learning opportunities, influencing the nature, type, quality, volume, flow and continuity of the knowledge that may be transferred. Other factors influencing knowledge transfer to the internationalising hotel chains are: trust, ACAP, transfer mechanisms and business practices, general partner fit and psychic distance. Culture, psychic distance and their effect on internationalisation are analysed in the following section.

2.4.3 Culture and psychic distance

As hotel chains and services in general, are people-led, they also have a highly cultural-sensitive aspect (Pauwels & de Ruyter, 2005). This also means that hotel chains require local customisation to ensure compliance. Research on the internationalisation of hotels has always focused on the debate between a 'standardisation versus customisation' approach, highlighting the benefits of both (Nickson, 1998; Sutthijakra, 2011; Zenga et

al., 2012). According to Clark and Rajaratman (1999), international services are different from domestic services, as they can be applied beyond national borders and embrace foreign cultures. 'Soft services' in particular, such as hotel chains that provide services that are inseparable, as seen in the previous chapter, require the service firm to have a local presence. Country-specific factors therefore are essential to the success of the internationalisation effort of a service firm (Dunning, 1980). These country-specific factors specify what customisations are necessary, while hotel chains strive to achieve a balance between a globalised and a localised approach, in order to benefit from both (Yu et al., 2014). According to Whitley et al. (2007), the strategic advantages that a standardised approach would include are: economies of scale, operational performance efficiency, control and consistency. On the other hand, a localised or customised approach would offer the opportunity to be more flexible and more responsive to local demands, which may lead to an increase in efficiency and customer satisfaction. The compromise and balanced approach between the two strategies has been seen as the transnational model of internationalisation, that takes advantage of the benefits of a global strategy, yet is sensitive to country-specific factors, such as culture (London & Hart, 2004; Sousa & Lengler, 2009; Stonehouse et al., 2009). International business research has shown that national culture influences the business strategies of firms (Apetrei et al., 2015; Sousa & Lengler, 2009), from capital structure and modes of entry to group performance (Chui et al., 2002; Gibson, 1999). Cultural factors also do have an impact on the choice of mode of entry for a firm (Kogut & Singh, 1988). According to Davenport and Prusak (1998), who looked into group performance, culture can also have an impact on the effectiveness of knowledge transfer across national borders from one organisational unit to another.

Culture has been defined as "patterns of beliefs and values that are manifested in practices, behaviours, and various artefacts shared by members of an organisation or a nation" (Pothukuchi et al., 2002, p. 244). The knowledge and understanding of these patterns of beliefs and values are essential to the internationalising firm (Leonaviciene & Burinskiene, 2022; Roberts, 1999). The knowledge of the local cultural aspects is seen as part of a market's institutional knowledge, which allows the firm to identify all potential opportunities and risks when expanding (Eriksson et al., 2015; Hadley &

Wilson, 2003). It is therefore of an imperative importance for the internationalisation firm, particularly for services that require adaptation, to obtain knowledge of the local culture and ensure the success of the expansion effort (Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Petersen et al., 2003).

Johanson and Vahlne (1977) defined psychic distance as all the obstacles in the free flow of information from and to the country or market of interest. They argued that these obstacles can be related to differences in language, education, business culture, business ethos and general industrial development. Similarly, Hollensen (2007, p. 55) stated that “psychic distance is defined in terms of factors such as differences in language, culture and political systems, which disturb the flow of information between the firm and the market”. Khojastehpour and Johns (2014) explain that psychic distance is the main reason that businesses tend to first target their immediate neighbouring countries, as the geographical location seems to imply greater knowledge and understanding of those markets, as well as more opportunities to obtain information. Psychic distance therefore explains the internationalisation pattern through which businesses first expand to markets that are closer and later on to markets that are less familiar and geographically distant (Chang, 2011). According to Kontinen and Ojala (2010), psychic distance is a pre-market entry concept, and the appropriate mode of entry will reduce it. Personal experience, networking, previous knowledge and the ability to establish and maintain strong networks will support the business in overcoming the psychic distance obstacles (Kontinen & Ojala, 2010; Sousa & Lengler, 2009). Kontinen and Ojala (2010) specifically highlight the importance of honesty, friendliness and trustworthiness in creating good networks which will have an impact on psychic distance.

Having explored the literature on internationalisation theories and models from a services perspective, it can be argued that knowledge has a central role within the process. The following section investigates knowledge management and the mechanisms of it within the internationalisation process, in an effort to identify its' function and usefulness.

2.5 Knowledge management

Knowledge management is a relatively new concept within academia and emerged in the eighties (Cooper, 2006). Petersen et al. (2003) argued that the role of knowledge was underestimated in the early internationalisation models and that it plays a more important role than initially thought and this partially explains the materialisation of the 'born global' phenomenon within the internationalisation process. Knowledge about international markets and the learning competence of the business as well as the capacity to absorb and integrate this knowledge are important factors within the internationalisation process of a company (Almeida et al., 2002). Knowledge management (KM) can be defined as "the encouragement of people to share knowledge and ideas to create value-adding products and services" (Chase, 1997, p. 83). Wiig (1999) added that KM is a process through which a firm can transform research outcomes into capabilities, enabling it to act successfully. Finally, Denning (2000, p. 114) looked more into the tangible aspects of KM and explained that the term needs to be seen as comprising of multiple dimensions including "knowledge strategy, communities of practice, help desks, knowledge bases, knowledge capture, knowledge storage, knowledge dissemination, knowledge taxonomies, quality assurance, authentication procedures, budget incentives, and knowledge measures". As the way people view knowledge depends on their philosophical stance (Assudani, 2005), before analysing internationalisation from a knowledge management perspective, it is important to establish what the nature of knowledge is within this discussion and define the approach that will be taken to explore it.

2.5.1 Knowledge as a concept

The previous analysis of the models and theories of internationalisation highlights the importance of knowledge within the process of extending a firm's business across national borders. The sharing of this knowledge between different business units and also between different firms is crucial for the achievement of a knowledge based competitive advantage (Argote & Ingram, 2000). The concept of knowledge has always been around, not however in a clearly defined way and very often used interchangeably

with terms such as 'information' (Ghaziri & Awad, 2005), as well as 'capability' and 'experience' (Nordman & Melen, 2008). Huber (1991) for example, used the terms knowledge and information interchangeably. He did however explain that information is data that give meaning by taking away ambiguity, equivocality or uncertainty and knowledge to more complex outcomes of learning or know-how. Furthermore, different approaches to determining knowledge have been discussed in the literature (Beesley & Cooper, 2008) with different values and meanings ascribed to these terms (Grover & Davenport, 2001). According to Drucker (in Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p. 2), information is data with meaning. Data is a set of objective facts about events and without meaning has little relevance or purpose (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Information in the other hand can be described as 'a message', usually presented as a document, an audible or visible communication, involving a sender and a receiver. Information aims to 'give shape to' and to 'inform'. According to Davenport and Prusak (1998), the receiver is the person that decides whether a message is information, as it might only contain data which are meaningless. They further explain that information is transferred within and without organisations, using hard and soft networks. Knowledge can be difficult to define. Nonaka et al. (2000, p. 2), define it as "context-specific, relational, dynamic and humanistic". Davenport and Prusak (1998, p. 5) admit that knowledge is difficult to define and provide a working definition of it: "knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organisations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organisational routines, processes, practices and norms". The elements of embeddedness within individuals adds another layer of complexity in the effort to define knowledge. It essentially is personalised information, possessed in the minds of individuals (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Nonaka (1994, p. 156), explains that information is a flow of messages and therefore different from knowledge, which is "created and organised by the very flow of information, anchored on the commitment and beliefs of its holder". He further explains that individuals change information through comparison, conversation, connections, and consequences. Beesley and Cooper (2008) argued that data and information are objects, while knowledge can be seen as an activity. This is due to the embeddedness of

knowledge and generation through human activities, such as thinking and reasoning, as well as experience (Brauner & Becker, 2006). Thus, the focus of knowledge management is knowledge rather than information and data (Beesley & Cooper, 2008).

2.5.2 Organisational learning

KM as a concept, was developed through a wide range of disciplines, such as organisational learning (OL) (Senge, 1994). The relationship between OL and KM can be conceptualised in many ways (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003) as these two streams overlap, although sometimes perspectives might differ (Von Krogh et al., 2012). OL can be seen as focusing on processes and KM as focusing on the content and knowledge that a business acquires, creates, processes and uses (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003). From a different perspective, OL can be seen as the goal of KM (King, 2009). This is due to the processes of learning and the notion of continuous improvement that organisations are striving for, usually seen as an organisational learning cycle (Dixon, 1994). Spinello (2000) finally highlighted the intimate connection between OL and the transfer of knowledge. In the present thesis, based on the above, OL is seen as a process and goal of KM.

Organisational learning has been defined as “a process in which members of an organisation detect errors or anomalies and correct it by restructuring organisational theory of action, embedding the results of their inquiry in organisational maps and images” (Argyris 1977, p. 116). Daft and Weick (1984) conceptualised it as the result of action outcome relationships between the external environment and the organisation. Levitt and March (1988) added that OL occurs through deduction from the past events into new policies and procedures that direct behaviour. Senge (1990) referred to the role of the individual within the process of OL and Pedler et al. (1991) expanded on it, highlighting the facilitation of the learning of the organisation members. They also referred to OL as a process of continuous transformation. McKee (1992) approached OL as a distinctive capability to learn from innovations, rather than production. Nevis et al. (1995, p. 73), emphasised experience, defining OL as “the capacity of processes within an organisation to maintain or improve performance based on experience”. Finally,

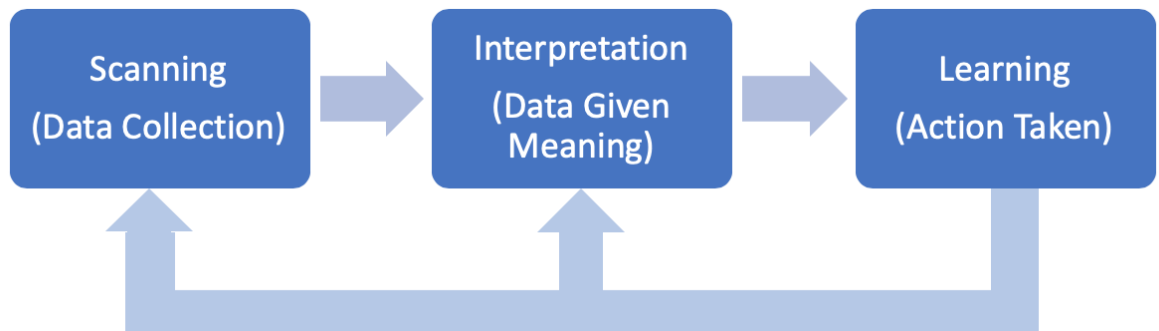
Ingram and Baum (2001, p. 111), approaching OL from an operating experience viewpoint, defined it as “an improvement in performance or the capacity to perform from (own or others’) experience”. The literature on OL has been approached by many different perspectives, such as sociological, communicative, operational, management and human resources development, mainly on a theoretical basis (Dixon, 1992; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Huber, 1991; Levitt & March, 1988). When it comes to research within the context of the hotel industry, the literature is very little and scant, although the importance of it is emphasised in several studies (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2016; De Correia et al., 2019; Ingram & Baum 2001; Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021). Horsburgh (1991) however, explained that for hotel companies to develop internationally in a competitive manner, the ability to learn, which will lead to superior knowledge, is essential.

Argyris (1977), argued that organisation learning takes place on two different levels of cognition and result in a ‘single loop’ and a ‘double loop’ learning. The single loop learning does not demand a shift different individual or organisational cognitive structures and takes place within the current framework of doing things. Double loop learning demands a change in the current frames of reference so that new knowledge can be produced. He further explained that there are obstacles in double loop learning, such as the resistance to change and the difficulty individuals have in knowing their theories of action. Argyris (1997, p. 116) explained that “learning involves a new response or action based on the interpretation” and that learning is an action that makes cognitive theory to work. This notion was also supported by Huber (1991) as well, who worked on organisational learning based on cognitivism.

Daft and Weick (1984), proposed a model for OL, viewing organisations as interpretative systems. Interpretation is a process that allows information to take meaning and for actions to be chosen. Their view is based on the nature of organisational behaviour and organisational activities, emphasising the importance of the continuous scanning of the environment (Pfefer & Salancik, 2003; Pondy & Mitroff, 1979). Daft and Weick (1984) organised previous OL concepts into a more generic organisational model of interpretation that involved three stages: Scanning (data collection), Interpretation (data given meaning) and leaning (action taken) (See figure 2.5). They further explained

that these three processes are very complex, due to other factors involved, such as beliefs, politics, goals and perceptions, stating that the main aim of their model is to illustrate the relationships between these three processes (Staw, 1980).

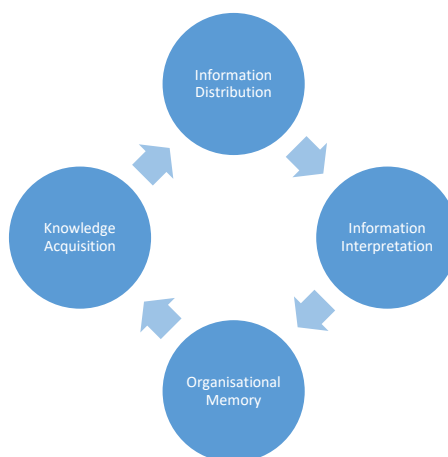
Figure 2.5: Relationship among organisational scanning, interpretation and learning



Source: Daft & Weick (1984)

The next effort of conceptualise OL was made by Huber (1991), followed by Dixon (1992), who expanded on Huber's model. Huber (1991), when defining OL explained that learning occurs when the organisation has obtained new information that is deemed to be potentially useful. Based on the work of different authors, including the conceptual model by Daft and Wick (1984), he synthesised a framework for organisational learning. The framework includes four main constructs and processes: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organisational memory (see figure 2.6). Within these processes, Huber includes subconstructs and subprocesses. Knowledge acquisition is the process through which knowledge is obtained. Information distribution is the process by which information by difference sources is shared and transferred, leading to new knowledge or understanding. Information interpretation is the way through which the knowledge that has been shared is given commonly understood interpretations. Organisational memory is the way that knowledge is stored and maintained.

Figure 2.6: Huber's Organisational Learning Model

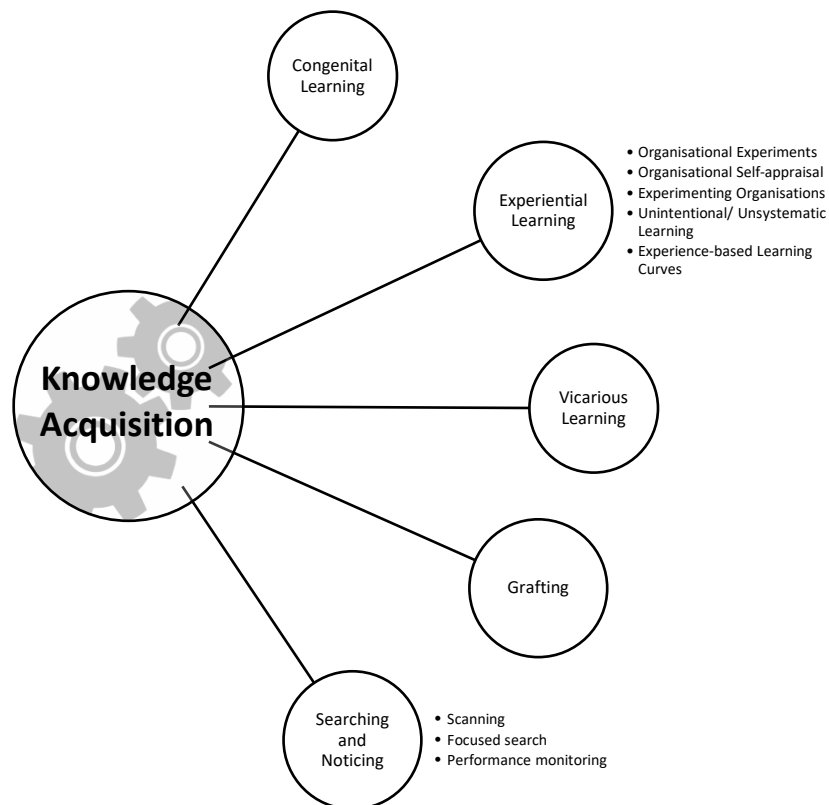


Source: Compiled with information from Huber (1991)

Knowledge acquisition contains five subconstructs and subprocesses (see figure 2.7). The first one is 'congenital learning' and can be defined as inherited knowledge (Huber, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Slater & Narver, 1995). Inherited knowledge is a combination of the knowledge inherited at the start of the organisation and may contain institutionalised knowledge, including the knowledge of the founders, and knowledge obtained through vicarious learning (observing others) and grafting (bring in expertise). Born globals can be a very good example of congenital knowledge, but usually placing more emphasis on the knowledge of the founders (Nordman & Melen, 2008). Congenital knowledge plays an important role in the direction of future learning (Driver, 1993; Huber, 1991; Minbaeva et al., 2014). According to Huber (1991), the second aspect of knowledge acquisition is 'experiential learning'. This includes five more subconstructs and subprocesses: organisational experiments (mainly involves learning from feedback about cause-and-effect relationships between organisational actions and results), organisational self-appraisal (a focus on the interaction and participation of the members of the organisation, on learning and creating or using new frames of reference, such as the double-loop concept of Argyris, 1982). The third aspect of knowledge acquisition is 'experimenting organisations' and involves the degree of flexibility of an organisation to adapt to the external environment and therefore its response to learning opportunities. The fourth one is the 'unintentional or unsystematic learning'. This aspect involves learning through search related functions, activated through organisational structure and its effectiveness, through post-decision-making analysis, through the

informal analysis of teamwork (Herriott et al., 1985; Huber, 1991). The fifth and final aspect of congenital learning is ‘experience-based learning curves’ and involves the positive impact that experiential learning may have on organisational performance, through possible production cost, time reductions and other benefits that might be predicted through mathematical models (also called ‘experience curves or ‘learning curves’) (Huber, 1991).

Figure 2.7: Knowledge Acquisition



Source: Compiled with information from Huber (1991)

The third subconstruct and subprocess of knowledge acquisition, is ‘vicarious learning’. This type of knowledge acquisition occurs, when organisations learn from the policies, practices, strategies and technologies of other organisations. Firms may obtain learnings through operating different modes of entry as well, by observing their partners (Chandler & Lyon, 2009). This term relates to the concept of learning how corporate competitors do things and can also be called ‘corporate intelligence’ (Fuld, 1988; Huber, 1991). Factors supporting this kind of learning can be consultants, conferences and professional exhibitions, professional meetings, publications, vendors and suppliers and also networks of professionals (Huber, 1991). This type of learning is also based on the

'institutional theory' that supports that organisations that wish to avoid sanctions from different stakeholders, would imitate others (Zucker, 1987). This however might not work in highly competitive and fast-paced environments or when technologies are poorly understood, and goals are not clear (House & Singh, 1987). Dutton and Freedman (1985) explored the reasons that would support the acquisition of second-hand knowledge against first-hand experience and the opposite.

The fourth element of knowledge acquisition is 'grafting' (Huber, 1991). This subprocess occurs when organisations are acquiring and 'grafting' new employees who possess needed knowledge. The process requires that this new knowledge was not previously available to the organisation. According to Huber (1991, p. 97), "grafting is often faster than acquisition through experience and more complete than acquisition through imitation".

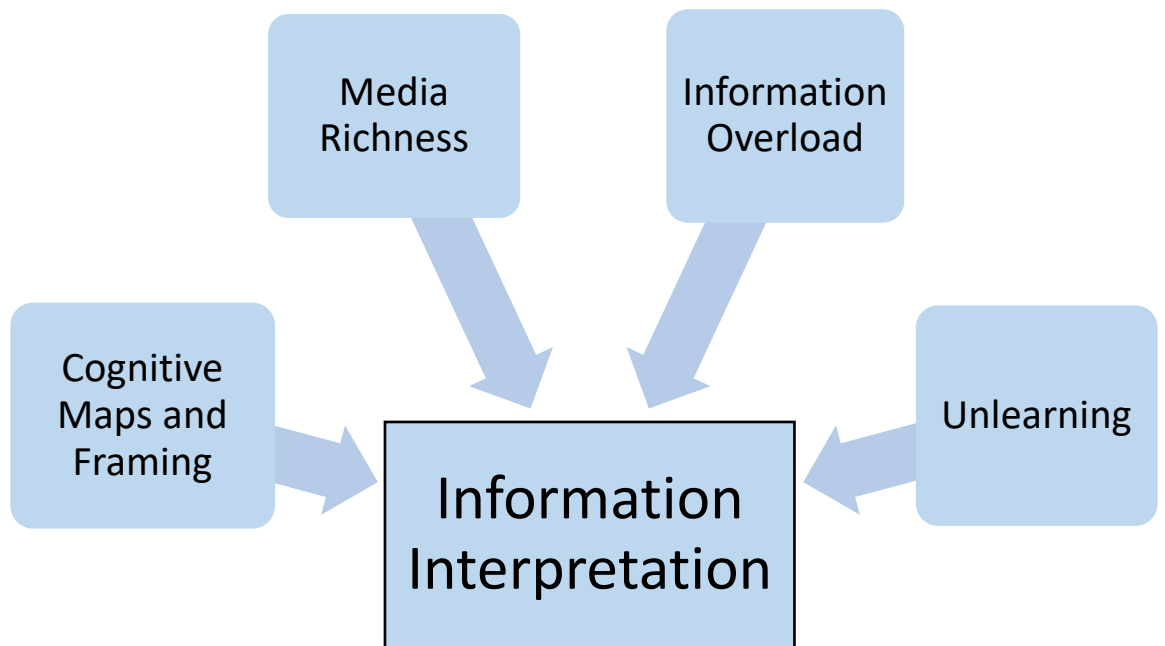
The fifth subconstruct and subprocess of knowledge acquisition is 'searching and noticing' (Huber, 1991). Acquiring information needed by the organisation can take place in three forms: Scanning (analysing the external environment on a micro and macro level); Focused search (conducting proactive or reactive research on a specific area of interest for the organisation, when other sources of knowledge are not adequate) and Performance monitoring (learning through assessments on how well the organisation is performing and whether the standards are met).

'Information distribution' is the second construct and process associated with OL (Huber, 1991). This is a process that affects both the occurrence and breadth of OL. Organisations have the opportunity to create new information and also better understand it, by connecting together pieces of information obtained from different organisational units. When it comes to organisational learning breadth, information distribution plays an important role. When information becomes available throughout an organisational structure, retrieval is more likely to be effective and individuals to learn. According to Huber (1991), the different departments or units of an organisation that potentially have synergistic information, are sometimes unaware as to how to treat it or even its usefulness. He also suggests that internal employee transfers could

facilitate and encourage the coupling of pieces of information, that might lead to new organisational learnings.

According to Huber (1991), the next process associated with OL is 'information interpretation' (see figure 2.8). According to Daft and Weick (1984), interpretation is the action of adding meaning to information. They also defined it as a process of "translating events and developing shared understandings and conceptual schemes" (Daft & Weick, 1984, p. 286). Huber (1991) concludes that as organisations develop their learning, more varied interpretations and understandings of it are developed at the same time, which may lead to a bigger range of potential behaviours for the organisation. He further states, that the interpretations of new learning in an organisation depend on the uniformity of prior cognitive maps (uniformity is needed as different belief structures and frames of reference exist through individuals and organisational units), the uniformity of the framing of the information as it is communicated (socially constructed interpretation in organisations need to be taken into consideration when framing information uniformly), the richness of the channels used to share the information (it impacts the extent to which meaning is provided by both sender and receiver of the communicated information), the information overload on the information-receiving departments (all units have a specific capacity in processing information effectively and this should be maintained), and the amount of unlearning that may be needed to allow for new learning to take place. According to Webster (1992), unlearning, which can be facilitated through socialisation, is to purposefully ignore obsolete and misleading knowledge, allowing thus for new learnings.

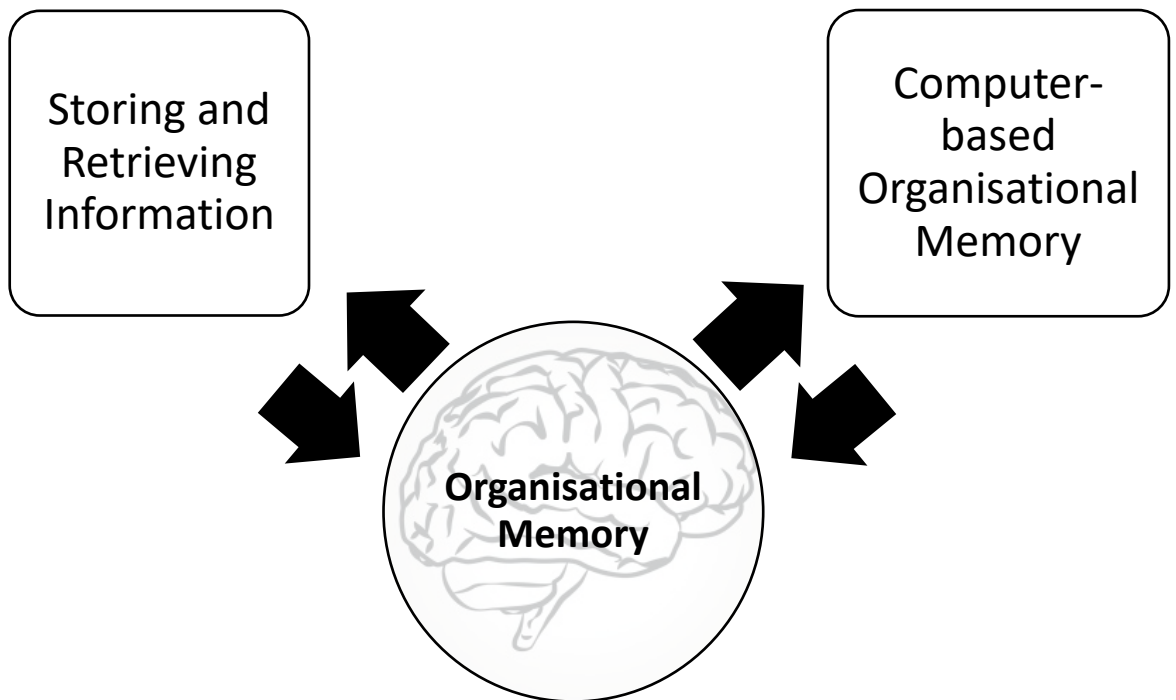
Figure 2.8: Information Interpretation



Source: Compiled with information from Huber (1991)

The final construct and process associated with OL within Huber's framework (1991) is 'organisational memory' (see figure 2.9). This involves two aspects, or subprocesses: 'storing and retrieving information' and 'computer-based organisational memory'. According to Olivera (2000), the process of storing and retrieving knowledge are particularly relevant to multiunit organisations, where knowledge obtained in one sub-unit can benefit other units as well (Karlsen et al., 2003). When it comes to experiential knowledge, these processes become even more beneficial (Goodman & Darr, 1998), as they can reduce costs associated with repetition in creating solutions to common problems (Olivera, 2000).

Figure 2.9. Organisational Memory



Source: Compiled with information from Huber (1991)

Huber (1991) observes that employee turnover, non-anticipation of future needs and the lack of awareness of employees in knowing how to locate information, have a direct impact on an organisation's memory. Organisations deal with 'hard' and 'soft' information differently, when it comes to memory systems. Hard information is stored within manuals, instructions, procedures, routines, and scripts (Feldman, 1989), while soft may be stored mentally by managers and other employees (Mintzberg, 1975). Huber (1991) explains that the topic of organisational memory and how it treats different information is not well understood within the literature, especially when it comes to tacit knowledge and that it requires more research. He does however state that a solution to the above may be the computer-based organisational memory. This is due to the technological advancements of computerised systems, that provide tailored solutions that are becoming increasingly user-friendly and can provide automatic capturing and sophisticated retrieval of various pieces of information. They can also piece information together and support the creation of new learnings, something that is likely to increase in the future. When it comes to information of a soft nature, Huber

(1991) claims that tailored expert systems can offer accessibility, reliability and 'own ability' when handling soft information, that can surpass the abilities of human experts and offer a useful capability to organisational memory.

According to Huber (1991), the literature on organisational learning is rich, however there seems to be a lack of cumulative work and a lack of links between different research publications. Some of the areas that require further empirical development are: congenital learning, vicarious learning and grafting, as well as Information distribution, information interpretation and organisational memory. He also concluded that all the above organisational processes and subprocesses can have a direct impact on the number of potential organisational learning behaviours.

Table 2.1: Huber's framework on the Constructs and Processes of Organisational Learning

Constructs and Processes	Subconstructs and Subprocesses	Subconstructs and Subprocesses
1.0 Knowledge Acquisition	1.1 Congenital Learning	
	1.2 Experiential Learning	1.2.1 Organisational Experiments 1.2.2 Organisational self-appraisal 1.2.3 Experimenting organisations 1.2.4 Unintentional or unsystematic learning 1.2.5 Experience-based learning curves
	1.3 Vicarious Learning	
	1.4 Grafting	
	1.5 Searching and Noticing	
2.0 Informational distribution		1.5.1 Scanning 1.5.2 Focused search 1.5.3 Performance monitoring
3.0 Information Interpretation	3.1 Cognitive Maps and Framing 3.2 Media Richness 3.3 Information Overload	

4.0 Organisational Memory	3.4 Unlearning 4.1 Storing and Retrieving Information 4.2 Computer-based Organisational Memory	
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Source: Huber (1991)

Different authors worked with Huber’s (1991) framework and the concept of constructs and processes of organisational learning, expanding on its different components. Dixon (1992) using a similar terminology to Huber and borrowing from his work, developed the OL process, looking at it from a human resources management and development perspective. Similarly, Nevis et al. (1996), based on Huber’s and Dixon’s work, devised a three-step information processing cycle of organisational learning and expanded on it later on, adding more detail to it (Nevis et al., 2009). Huber’s work however, remains the main framework used to research knowledge management and organisational learning during the internationalisation process, as it encapsulates efficiently all processes and functions of OL (Bengtsson 2004; Casillas et al., 2010; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020).

When it comes to the hotel industry and international chains in particular, literature in organisational learning is underdeveloped and very little empirical research has been published (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2016). According to Ingram and Baum (2001), who researched organisational learning within hotel chains, the individual units of the chain benefited from re-using accumulated experiential knowledge that could be transferred and used in different scenarios. Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016), have also concluded that it is more likely that hotel chains operating internationally will pursue joint learning and regard the process of it as an integral part of the chain development. The present thesis is utilising Huber’s (1991) definition and knowledge acquisition processes, in line with established research in knowledge and learning within internationalisation (Bengtsson 2004; Casillas et al., 2010; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020).

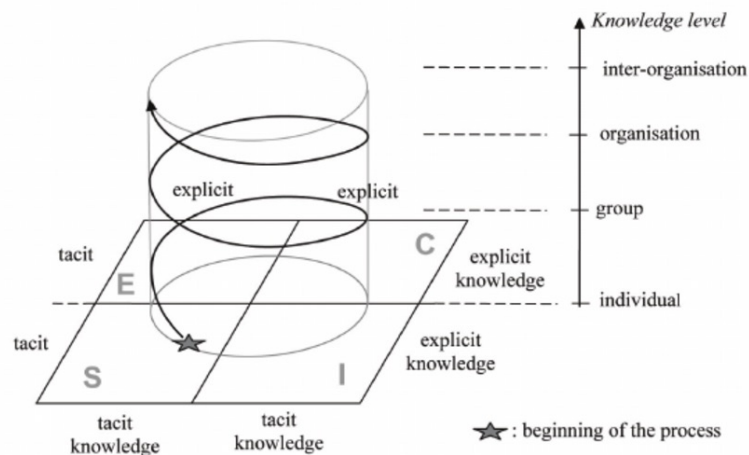
2.5.3 Organisational knowledge

Management literature has gone through different phases, while exploring the subject of OL. Penrose (1959) first highlighted the concept of the organisation as a bundle of resources and capabilities. Bell (1973) in his book titled: 'Coming of post-industrial society', observed that society in general is becoming a 'knowledge society' and that this would signal a shift in the way businesses innovate operationally, technically and strategically. The 'resource-based' view of the organisation led to a research interest towards the 'inside' of the organisation (Barney, 1991; Wiig, 1997). From there, research expanded to a more detailed exploration of the resource-based view elements, to the learning capabilities, intellectual capital and knowledge that an organisation holds (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The study of knowledge from a strategic viewpoint, is also known as the knowledge-based view (KBV) of an organisation (Grant, 1996; Styhre, 2004). The foundations however for the study of knowledge within organisations were established by Penrose (1959) and Polanyi (1969), in their nominal works. From there, different branches of KM related research activity emerged, focusing on creating, organising, sharing and using knowledge, in order to provide organisations with a competitive advantage (Wong & Aspinwall, 2004). Different knowledge enablers were also identified that support knowledge: people, organisation, process and system perspectives (Choi & Lee, 2002). Wiig (1997) identified five knowledge-centred strategies: knowledge strategy as business strategy, intellectual asset management strategy, personal knowledge asset responsibility strategy, knowledge creation strategy and knowledge transfer strategy. Although all these strategies are important for facilitating the above enablers in ways that will make best use of knowledge resources and capabilities (Choi & Lee, 2002), the capability to create and utilise knowledge seems to be regarded as the most crucial starting point of an organisation's sustainable competitive advantage (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Sveiby, 1997).

Penrose (1959) and Polanyi (1969) were the first to classify knowledge as objective or tacit. Polanyi (1983, p. 4), stated that "we can know more than we can tell", highlighting the difficulty of communicating tacit knowledge. Based on this classification and understanding, Nonaka through his work in the 1990's, developed the concept of

knowledge creation, as a product of a continuous dialogue between ‘tacit’ (experiential) and ‘explicit’ (objective) knowledge. He described this distinction as the ‘epistemological dimension’ to knowledge creation for organisations (Nonaka, 1994). More specifically, through Polanyi’s work, Nonaka (1994) supported that new organisational ideas are created through the dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge. He further supported that once these ideas formulate in the minds of individuals, interaction between them is imperative, in order to develop them further. He also argued that these ‘communities of interaction’, that might span across different departments and organisational boundaries, play a critical role in the support and growth of these ideas. Finally, he stated that these ‘communities of interaction’ and their extent of social interaction between individuals that share and develop knowledge, represent the ‘ontological dimension’ of knowledge creation. Nonaka presented a knowledge creation model (figure 2.10), known as SECI (socialisation – externalisation – combination – internalisation), based on the ‘spiral’ relationship tacit and explicit knowledge, while going through the epistemological and ontological dimensions of knowledge creation.

Figure 2.10: Knowledge creation model



Source: Ribeiro & Kimble (2009)

More specifically, the model involves four different modes or patterns of knowledge conversion (Nonaka, 1994). These patterns provide different approaches in creating new knowledge, utilising the existing sources, through social interaction amongst individuals. According to the knowledge creation model, these modes are:

- a) Socialisation: from tacit to tacit

b) Externalisation: from explicit to explicit

c) Combination: from tacit to explicit

d) Internalisation: from explicit to tacit

Finally, Nonaka et al. (2001, p. 499), described the foundation of the above processes “as a context in which knowledge is shared, created, and utilised, in recognition of the fact that knowledge needs a context in order to exist”, and called it ‘Ba’, based on the earlier works of Nishia and Shimizu (Bratianu, 2010).

There has been criticism on Nonaka’s model from various authors, on the fact that it was created based on an eastern cultural framework, and due to the definition of knowledge as justified true belief, the model might not be able to produce successful results in other cultures (Bratianu, 2010). Criticism has also included arguments that the model is too simplistic and too abstract and has overlooked studies from other disciplines, learning theory and earlier discussions of tacit knowledge (Gourlay, 2003; Jorna, 1998). Further to this, Nonaka considered knowledge as “a dynamic human process of justifying personal beliefs as part of an aspiration for the truth” (Nonaka, 1994, p. 15; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 15), which is something that according to Bratianu (2010), limits the status of objectivity of knowledge. Despite the criticism, Nonaka’s central SECI matrix has survived through time and according to Sarayreh et al. (2012), it is still very much in use. It has provided the ground for new theories on knowledge creation to emerge (McLean, 2004; Von Krogh et al., 2012). There have been several pieces of literature on organisation knowledge creation since Nonaka’s work, but they all seem to build upon the SECI model and mainly focusing on the effect of leadership on knowledge creation, and more specifically, empowerment, trust and autonomy.

Further to the KBV of the organisation and the SECI model, a growing concept that is closely linked to organisational learning and knowledge, is that of the intellectual capital. Intellectual capital refers to all types of knowledge, skills, information and processes that lead to value creation, possessed by an organisation (Engstrom et al., 2003). Intellectual capital can be distinguished into three categories: the human capital, the structural capital and the customer capital (Bontis & Fitz-enz, 2002; Sveiby, 1997). The

human capital comprises of the individual stock or employees of a company (Bontis et al., 2002), and includes their competence, attitude and intellectual ability (Engstrom et al., 2003). The structural capital comprises of all non-human aspects of knowledge within a business (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997), while customer capital all business relationships with clients (Bontis et al., 2000). Intellectual capital has been linked with superior business performance (Bontis, 1998; Bontis et al., 2000; Ferrier & McKenzie, 1999; Ognjanovic & Slavkovic, 2022) and in the case of the hotel industry, Engstrom et al. (2003), suggest that the individual knowledge of the hotel employees as well as the hotel structural capital are important aspects in operating a unit in a competitive environment.

2.5.4 Absorptive capacity

Cohen and Levinthal (1990), defined 'absorptive capacity' (ACAP), as the organisational ability to value, assimilate and adapt new external knowledge into its processes. Mowery and Oxley (1995), added to this definition the need for practices focusing on the tacit element of transferred knowledge and the practice of modifying this imported knowledge. Cohen and Levinthal (1990), approached ACAP, while placing their focus on the individual within the organisation, ascribing to the whole process the perception of rationality. They also focused on the acquisition of external knowledge, based on the individual ACAP capability premise. Bratianu and Orzea (2013), argued that an individual cannot rationally decide which theories, skills, emotions, and values need to be acquired when the particular person is involved in an intense emotional situation. Tu et al. (2006), argued that ACAP is an organisational function, rather than an individual one, that facilitates the processes of identifying, communicating, and assimilating relevant external and internal knowledge. The change of focus from the individual to an organisational level, supported the view of ACAP as a dynamic strategic mechanism, using both internal and external sources (Bratianu, 2015). Liao et al. (2010 p. 20), based on Cohen and Levinthal's external perspective, defined ACAP as "an employees' ability to obtain external knowledge and their willingness to transform this for usage in the firm's innovation capability". Their focus moved from a capacity of the individual to the employees' unified ability. Most literature emphasises the essential role of the

individual within the ACAP of a business, from both a holistic and unit perspective (Bratianu, 2015). Cohen and Levinthal (1990) link the professional experience of an individual to the capacity of the firm to assimilate, transform and exploit new knowledge. Overall, a firm's ACAP has a direct impact on its knowledge acquisition, as it facilitates the entire process, through the identification of useful knowledge, the clarification of the assimilation process that will be followed, and the balancing between the new knowledge and the previous one. According to Alavi and Leidner (2001), if this process is established within a business, it may support it in maintaining its competitive advantage. The balancing between new knowledge and existing one, is a case of complementarity (Lofstrom, 2000) and links to the ACAP of a firm (Zahra & George, 2002). Wagner (2004) argues that due to organisational ACAP depending largely on the ACAP limits of the individuals within the organisation (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), time pressure or generally a specific given time frame when internationalising for example, might create disruption, as the complexity of the external environment increases, causing inadequate structural adaptation.

Within the internationalisation literature, ACAP has always been looked at as the enabler of a firm to effectively learn in markets across national borders, and as a result, competing through superior international performance (Zahra & Hayton, 2008). Delios and Beamish (1999) argued that for international learning to be effective, the firm needs to have related knowledge stock. Different authors have highlighted however the advantages of early internationalisation, which although it might not agree with the tenets of the stages theory as it involves higher risk, enables firms to pursue rapid growth in foreign markets and perform well (Sapienza et al., 2006; Wu & Voss, 2015).

2.5.5 Organisational knowledge versus individual knowledge

As seen above, the framework of analysis seems to vary from research to research, as it moves from an organisational perspective to an individual one and the opposite, within the growing literature on knowledge management and organisational learning. The switch from one perspective to the other, has a major impact on how knowledge is viewed (Bratianu, 2015; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Siemsen et al., 2008). According to

Andresson (2000), the role of the individual in international business research was not explored in depth, until the 1990s.

Cohen and Levinthal (1990) seem to not have considered the fact of human interaction: life, personal development, and group work. As a consequence, this supports the transfer of individual abilities and capabilities from unit/ individual to group level (Tang et al., 2010) and the organisation is viewed as a bundle of knowledge (Bratianu, 2015; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). Yang (2007), also highlights that the ultimate aim of obtaining and transferring knowledge, is the transfer of all the experiences and knowledge of an individual, to the firm's capabilities and assets. Apart from the two dimensions (epistemological and ontological) of organisational knowledge creation mentioned in the previous chapter, Nonaka (1994) highlighted the role of the individual within the process, and more specifically their commitment, their beliefs and their intention, that are rooted within their value systems, as well as the role of their autonomy and the effects of changes or disruptions within the organisation and its environment. Nonaka through his work, showed how different knowledge types, can be transferred from an individual level to an organisational one and beyond that. An organisation therefore is a formal institution, that assimilates the knowledge created and owned by the individuals as well as groups, in the processes, regulations and methods of producing goods and services (Bratianu, 2015; Grant, 1996; Nonaka, 1994). Walsh and Ungson (1991), discussed organisational memory, highlighting the role of the individual. According to the same, organisational memory can be conceptualised as being formed by 'storage bins or retention facilities' and the individuals are parts of these bins, together with their own memory aids, such as files. Kogut and Zander (1992), have approached the discussion on the unit of analysis by looking into the personal, group, organisational and network knowledge. Before this however, they made a distinction between information and know-how. Based on Nelson and Winter's (1982) separation of skills from routines and Polanyi's (1966) qualities of tacit knowledge, they explained how the solution to a problem cannot fully capture the sense and search rules, or heuristics, of the individual, and how this know-how precedes the formal knowledge of the solution. From there, similarly to Nonaka's knowledge creation spiral concept (Nonaka, 1994), the know-how and information can be transferred into groups, through

frequent interaction and often through the growth of a unique code or unique language, such as Taylorist principles. This applies to the entire organisation, which in order to facilitate the transfer of information and know-how to different groups on different and wider organisational levels, uses a set of higher-order principles of systemisation that support its codification. From there, knowledge starts circulating in different communities or networks. For this last stage to occur, further codification needs to be applied, in order to establish a common language and organising principles (Kogut & Zander, 1992). As a new concept is created, it resonates around expanding networks of individuals, it is developed and clarified, and gradually becomes of value, obtaining wider acceptance and becoming crystallised (Nonaka, 1994). The same process was also identified by Huber (1991), who aimed his research at the company level activity. In his work on organisational learning, he conceptualised it into four steps: knowledge acquisition, organisational memory, information distribution and finally information interpretation. He also acknowledged that individuals have a direct impact on some knowledge activities in their own right (Casillas et al., 2015). Indeed, according to Polanyi's axiom, individuals know more than they can tell and even if an organisation takes all measures to facilitate the sharing of knowledge from individuals into groups and the wider organisation, there is always the case that part of that knowledge might be missed (Bhatt, 1998). From this perspective, individual knowledge and organisational knowledge are distinct yet interdependent (Bhatt, 2002; Stalk, 1998). According to Huber (1991), an organisation learns when one of its members acquires information, thus linking individual learning to organisational learning.

According to Bratianu (2015), when it comes to knowledge assimilation, each individual, as well as each company, have developed an ACAP. This level of development fluctuates from person to person and also from one company to another. It is however important to emphasise that a firm ACAP depends on the individual's ACAP, and that in fact it is more than a cumulative of all the firm's individuals ACAP (Tang et al., 2010; Bratianu, 2015). The individuals within a firm, have their own ACAP, which is based on their previous education and experiences, and will use it in order to activate the firm ACAP, only if they are motivated to do so (Kwok & Gao, 2005). It is therefore this 'emotional knowledge' that links the individual ACAP with the organisational ACAP (Bratianu, 2015).

Under the same light, an individual ACAP supports and sustains knowledge acquisition. According to Bratianu (2015), knowledge acquisition comes as a result of knowledge transfer at individual level, which then feeds into the organisation. The existence of previous knowledge in a specific area is essential in order for knowledge transfer to occur effectively (Driver, 1993; Minbaeva et al., 2010).

Organisational knowledge and its facets, from a unit analysis point of view, has been the central point of discussion in most research around organisational learning as well. From an organisational learning perspective, the topic of individual knowledge versus organisational knowledge and learning, has seen a lot of debate. Dodson (1993, p. 377) stated that “individuals are the primary learning entity in a firm and its individuals which create organisational forms that enable learning in ways which facilitate organisational transformations”. Glynn et al. (1994) agreed and focused on the importance of the ongoing interaction among individuals, or group learning activity, within the organisation, something also highlighted by Nevis et al. (1995). Nicolini and Mezner (1995), argued that the scope of focusing on learning only at an individual level is too narrow and suggested that it is more beneficial to focus on group and organisational level learning instead. Seely-Brown (1993) conceptualised organisational learning as a community activity, emphasising the importance of both individual and organisational learning, as two interdependent activities. He argued about the importance of communities as facilitators for creating and sharing knowledge. Several other authors emphasised the need to distinguish learning into three levels, individual, group and organisational (Crossan et al., 1999; Matthews et al., 2017; Nevis et al., 1995; Nicolini & Mezner, 1995; Simons, 1995). Fiol and Lyles (1985) looked into the ability that organisations have to maintain characteristics over time, such as certain ways of doing things, mental maps, norms and values. They supported that it is due to these characteristics that new learning can take place, as according to Driver (1993, p. 122), “all learning takes place in the context of prior learning”. The need for the existence of prior knowledge to allow new learnings take place, is also supported by Minbaeva et al. (2010). Simons (1995) supported that there can be no organisational learning without the individual and group learning and also the opposite. Individual and group learning

cannot take place without the organisational context and support. Nevis et al. (2009), stated that both individual and group learning are of equal importance within OL. They also very interestingly supported that: “learning is a system-level phenomenon because it stays with the organisation even if individuals change” (1995, p. 73). This statement however is debatable, as the literature suggests a link between the loss of OL with the change of individuals within the organisation, particularly when poor internal knowledge capturing mechanisms are in place (Groysberg et al., 2008; Joe et al., 2013; Martins & Martins, 2011) and this is something that requires further investigation. The role of the individual as a facilitator of organisational knowledge flows, has finally been highlighted within the context of service internationalisation by Andersson (2000). This is mainly due to the nature of services and the need of relationship development as well the need for adaptation, both of which require the effective transfer of knowledge (Lindsay et al., 2003).

From the above analysis of the role of individual level and organisational level learning, it can be seen that the different levels of learning: individual, group and organisational are interlinked and one cannot effectively take place, without the other. The inter-organisation level of Nonaka’s SECI model, as well as the concept of networks, come to add another crucial dimension to learning and knowledge creation theory. It seems therefore that individual knowledge and organisational knowledge are indeed distinct yet interdependent.

When it comes to the role of the individual versus organisational knowledge within internationalisation, Lindsay et al. (2003), support that the role of the individual is of a particular importance for multinational service firms. Due to the nature of services, the higher human knowledge involvement within service industries creates a higher need for the development of relationships with the parent company and also customers, in order to support knowledge flows (Buckley et al., 1992). Again, due to their nature, services within internationalisation, often need to be adapted more than products, and require the parent company to be more involved in supporting this adaptation. Therefore, service firms have a high dependence on knowledge flows, which in turn depend on individuals within the organisation to build relationships, to create and

transmit knowledge (Lindsay et al. 2003). From a 'born global' perspective, the knowledge within this particular type of organisation, is stored within the individuals that start the organisation, and not within the organisation's procedures and routines (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994; March, 1991; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Nordman & Melen, 2008). Such proprietary knowledge seems to be embedded in individuals (Hitt et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 2001). Several authors have stated that organisational level knowledge cannot supersede individual level knowledge within 'born global firms' (McDougall et al., 1994), due to the fact that 'born globals' do not have any organisational international history (Autio, 2005).

2.5.6 Knowledge within business internationalisation

Having analysed the main models of business internationalisation from a services perspective, having established the importance of knowledge within them and having analysed the main OL concepts, this chapter will proceed with a more detailed analysis of knowledge within the internationalisation process, focusing on the role of experiential knowledge in particular.

The importance of KM and OL within the process of business internationalisation is well recognised (Fletcher & Harris, 2011; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). From a dynamic capabilities' perspective, internationalisation can be described as a learning process (Casillas et al, 2009), as firms are collections of knowledge and their ability to learn has a direct impact on their growth (Zhao & Luo, 2002). Although internationalisation models acknowledge their importance in expanding to foreign markets, they do not however explain how firms learn and also what the challenges are that management has to deal with in facilitating these processes and how to address them (Fletcher & Harris, 2011; Forsgren, 2002; Zahra, 2005). From an internationalisation perspective, Fletcher and Harris (2011), suggest that there are three types of knowledge that are most relevant to the internationalising firm: technological knowledge, market knowledge and internationalisation knowledge. Internationalisation knowledge is concerned with the knowledge of managing internationally. Petersen et al. (2003), based on their work, highlighted even more the differences previously established

between experiential and objective knowledge. They supported that objective knowledge that is obtained through market research can easily be moved to other geographical areas and also to be copied by other companies. Objective knowledge that is acquired through market research, online sources and textbooks is different from experiential knowledge which is unique and company specific (Blomstermo & Choi, 2003). Fletcher and Harris (2011), utilising Huber's OL framework, also distinguish the sources of knowledge for the internationalising firm into experiential knowledge and objective knowledge. Furthermore, they suggest that experiential knowledge that can be acquired directly, can be vicarious or grafted, and objective, externally and internally based. Hilmersson (2014) argued that the main type of knowledge that would benefit organisational growth is tacit or experiential knowledge. Eriksson et al. (2000, p. 29) categorised knowledge from an international perspective into three types: Internationalisation knowledge (the capability and resources of a business to Internationalize), business knowledge (competition in other specific markets) and Institutional knowledge (information on structures and systems in particular countries).

As has been previously highlighted, objective knowledge can be taught, while however experiential knowledge needs to be gained through actual experience. Experiential knowledge can significantly reduce the risks that come with international development, and this is the reason that it has come to be the focus of most internationalisation theories and models (Hilmersson, 2014; Madsen, 2005). The transformation of the experience a firm has gained into objective knowledge is a process that takes time and is an incremental process. This knowledge is then used to guide and inform the particular firms' actions, perceptions and interpretations as well as overall behaviour within an internationalisation context (Jansson, 2007). According to Meyer and Estrin (1997), the more internationalisation knowledge a firm has, the less tacit knowledge it needs to generate. This internationalisation knowledge is not country market-specific and can be used and transferred in different markets (Eriksson et al., 2000; Petersen et al., 2003; Zahra et al., 2000). In specific markets however, a firm can also generate experiential knowledge that is market specific and classed as 'institutional knowledge' (Eriksson et al., 2000). Goerzen and Makino (2007), argued of the importance of firm-specific knowledge transfer and accumulating location-specific knowledge as a motive

for international expansion. Eriksson et al. (1997), conducted research that supported that accumulated internationalisation experience is not specifically attached to particular country markets, but it is company specific knowledge related to all markets. Hilmersson's work (2014) on experiential knowledge types, furthers classifies one more type of market specific knowledge called 'business network knowledge', which stems from the interaction with network partners, such as clients, competitors, and other stakeholders.

According to Sharma and Johanson (1987), the internationalisation process can be seen as an interplay between an international learning process and an international resource commitment process.

Companies in their first steps of internationalising, differ from the ones that are more experienced (Andersson, 2004). The lack of this experience constitutes a serious obstacle when entering a new complex environment and Jones and Coviello (2005) explain this issue as a sequence of behaviours. Based on this assumption, Andersson (2004) stated that accumulated experiential internationalisation knowledge may help reduce uncertainty. According to Brida et al., (2015), as most studies in the field of business internationalisation used a cross-sectional approach; time and speed has had a lesser role in the research of the process. Mohr and Batsakis (2014) also support the view that although time has always been viewed as an important factor for competitiveness, research on it is scarce at best. Johanson and Vahlne (1977, p. 28) support that internationalisation is best described as "a process of incremental learning from foreign markets that develops over time". This is also supported by Andersson (2004), who also views internationalisation as a process of evolution along phases. Based on this view, Brida et al. (2015) explain that companies move from one phase to the other within their process of moving abroad and obtaining knowledge. Mohr and Batsakis (2014) state that international experience supports companies to obtain more knowledge and new skills that are helpful when internationalising their operations within these different phases. Moreover, the same authors support that this international experience helps and 'pushes' companies to internationalise more rapidly, when moving from phase to phase, when compared to companies with little or no

international experience. Therefore, the experiential knowledge that is related with international experience can be seen as supporting the rapid internationalisation process of company operations.

The hospitality industry is becoming more and more knowledge based due to the nature of services: the service delivery occurs as a result of the interaction between employees and customers. It is required that the employees are knowledgeable of the customer needs in order to fulfil their needs and requirements (Kahle, 2002). Concentrating on the hotel industry, the first and most obvious benefit of KM is that knowledge is made ready to be used. According to Bouncken and Pyo (2002), the major benefit of KM is the reuse of proven knowledge and readiness of knowledge to use. Readily available knowledge increases the speed of business operations, by reducing the knowledge search time. The same authors argue that the effective implementation of KM to a hotel can maintain a healthy business operation and create a competitive edge over competition. This happens through the re-use of proven knowledge in management and operations as well as formal and informal procedures (Pyo et al., 2002). Six sigma, integrated supply chain management as well as total quality management practices embrace KM and can work hand in hand. The benefits of implementing KM within the internationalisation efforts of a hotel are: the fact that duplication of research can be avoided, research and development costs are reduced by taking into consideration previous projects and works completed, while effectiveness within the operations is increased, again due to the accumulated experience and empirical research.

KM efforts within the hotel industry are mainly observed within major hotel chains, focusing on storing, sharing and retrieving knowledge between the individual units of the chain and the HQ, always on an operational level (Hallin & Marnburg, 2008). Research that was carried out by Bouncken (2002) on the Accor Hotel Group, showed that the company is engaged in KM activities focus mainly on an IT based KM system and access to it as well as motivation for knowledge creation and the use of it (i.e. best practices, training examples, service innovations, etc.). Hilton Hotels are also engaging in knowledge creation, storing it and sharing it when it comes to training schemes through the use of IT (HRMGuide, 2006). It is therefore obvious that an effort is taking

place to integrate the principles of KM into the Hotel Industry by some of the largest companies, however things seem to go with a slow pace and on an operational or unit level. According to Yun (2004), this is due to the complexity of the concept, which requires certain skills in areas such as data mining, statistics and an extensive knowledge of hotel management. Enz and Siguaw (2003) argued that a lot of innovative ideas and best practices within hospitality begin and end with specific individuals. It seems that management that creates knowledge within hotel businesses take that knowledge with them when they leave, or it is very common that the knowledge that is left behind is not being used/ discontinued as this person is not there to support it, or simply replaced by new knowledge brought in by the new management (instead of adding and building on it). According to Rodriguez et al. (2010), the same happens during the internationalisation efforts of a hotel, as they do not have the mechanisms to capture and handle the knowledge acquired in previous internationalisation experiences. The same authors argue that hotels are not capable of predicting the risks that they will have to face during the process, and are also unable to capture experiential knowledge, therefore failing to turn internationalisation into a sustainable competitive advantage.

2.5.7 Knowledge transfer

Kogut and Zander (1993, p. 625), described firms, as “social communities that specialize in the creation and internal transfer of knowledge”. Social communities maintain an open pool of diverse and specialist knowledge (Kogut, 2000). Their work was one of the first ones to view organisations from a knowledge transfer perspective, with a special reference to tacit knowledge. According to them, the value of an organisation is defined as its’ store of knowledge, and a further development of the boundaries of this organisation, is related to the transfer of this knowledge. Kogut and Zander (1993) further explained the differential costs of transmitting knowledge within an organisation, in comparison to the same between organisations, can determine the organisational model a firm would adapt in markets across borders. Tallman (2003), agrees and suggests that knowledge transmission might be a public good, however not always free. The more tacit this knowledge is, the more difficult and costly would be its transmission. He further explains that the mode of entry and technology would also play

a role in this cost. Tallman and Fladmoe-Lindquist (2002), expanding on the work by Kogut and Zander (1993), highlight the importance of common understandings on the transformation and transfer of knowledge through repeated interaction, which can have an impact on the complexity and cost of the operation, especially when the knowledge is tacit.

Having established the importance of knowledge, and experiential knowledge in particular within internationalisation, in the previous chapters, the process of sharing it effectively is as important, in terms of a firm's competitiveness (Cooper, 2006; Jetter & Chen, 2012; Leonard & Sensiper, 1998). Knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing are both terms that tend to be used interchangeably by different authors. Knowledge transfer occurs within networks, on both a micro and also macro levels. These macro levels in turn, have inter and extra organisational levels, depending on the size of the business or the size and type of the industry (Cooper, 2006). Knowledge transfer is considered as critical for an organisation to be competitive, in both home and international markets (Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Grant, 1996). According to Yang (2007), the more individual knowledge is transferred to organisational levels and beyond, the better the degree of strength of business capabilities and effectiveness will become. Van Den Hooff and De Ridder (2004, p. 118), defined knowledge sharing as "the process by which individuals mutually exchange their knowledge and collaboratively generate new knowledge". Knowledge transfer occurs after knowledge resources have been identified, captured in both tacit and explicit format, codified, processed and evaluated (Cooper, 2006). The process of knowledge transfer also includes push and pull mechanisms (Hjalager, 2002), as well as flows (Bratianu, 2015; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). According to Garcia-Almeida and Yu (2015), the successful transfer of knowledge between HQ and international units, as well as the opposite, would have a positive influence on the improvement of the competitive advantage and long-term profitability of international hospitality operations. Within hospitality, this would translate into service consistency, high guest satisfaction, high brand loyalty and service innovation (Olsen et al., 1998; Pizam, 2007; Williams & Shaw, 2011). Williams and Shaw (2011) highlighted the importance of internal and external knowledge within the internationalisation of tourism firms and their role in innovation and competitiveness. They also stated that innovation requires the transfer of knowledge between national

and international units. Knowledge transfer depends on the strategies and models used by firms. According to the same authors, replication and imitative innovation are extremely important, and therefore the vertically organised models of production (Hymer, 1960; Kindleberger, 1969) are suitable for knowledge transfer, as they support knowledge creation in the home country and distribution to the international markets. When it comes to services and the hospitality industry in particular however, this might not be the case, due to the fact that it is people-oriented and bears service characteristics, thus requiring local adaptation, making knowledge obtained locally critical, which needs to be fed back to HQ and vice versa (Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015).

When it comes to research in knowledge transfer within the international development of the tourism and hospitality industries, it seems that knowledge transfer has received more attention within the latter (Hallin & Marnburg, 2008; Shaw & Williams, 2009; Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015). It is however equally important for both, as these industries grow internationally by using knowledge transfer resource-based strategies (Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Hu et al., 2009) and there have been calls for more research (Hu et al., 2009; Pyo, 2005). Examining the literature, there has been a growing interest in research in knowledge management and its managerial implications within hospitality, but this has been focusing on the domestic market, rather than the international one (Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Hu et al., 2009; Kim & Hancer, 2010). Magnini (2008) developed a framework in an effort to improve management effectiveness through knowledge sharing in hotels, but he specifically focused however on international joint ventures. This framework identified three variables that have an impact on the knowledge sharing flows within an international hotel joint venture, on an individual level, relationship level and organisation-wide level (see table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Effective Information Sharing in Hotel IJVs

Individual Level Variable	Relationship Level Variables	Organisation-Wide Level Variables
Learning Orientation	Awareness	Commitment to Learn
Emotional Intelligence	Access	Innovativeness

Agreeableness	Trust	Conflict
Job Satisfaction	Cost	Shared Vision
	Respect	

Source: Magnini (2008)

Some further studies have researched knowledge transfer, in the form of best practices within international hotel chains, however these had a cultural orientation and a specific country context (Cervino & Bonache 2005; Yang, 2007). The fact that international hotel units can outperform domestic ones in some contexts, shows the impact and importance of transferring international business practices and know-how within international hotel chains (Dunning & McQueen, 1981; Pine & Qi, 2004). Different authors writing on hotel management within an international scale, identify two main strategic approaches, that of standardisation and homogeneity between all units, and that of local adaptation and the rejection of standardised management models (Ingram & Baum, 1997; Jones et al., 1998; Littlejohn, 1997). However, it seems that the hotel industry embraces a compromise between the two, where hotel chains transfer their systems and know-how to their new units abroad, making adjustments and using training for necessary adaptations when needed (Garcia-Almeida, 2004; Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015). The process of transferring knowledge between employees and between units, comes with several obstacles (Peterson et al., 2003). These obstacles could include the lack of commitment, low motivation, lack of incentives and training, lack of altruism, high costs associated with the process (Aguzzoli et al., 2021; Peterson et al., 2003; Shiue et al., 2010; Sousa et al., 2021). According to Garcia-Almeida and Yu (2015), the main factors that can affect the success of knowledge transfer within international hotel chains are: cultural compatibility, absorptive capacity, motivational attitudes of the participating agents, and the transfer of tacit knowledge and the richness of information. Their research focused on Spanish hotel chains operating internationally and revealed the positive impact that cultural compatibility has on intra-organisational knowledge transfer, the fact that the more the motivation of source agents, the more satisfied the recipients were, and finally that the greater the absorptive capacity is, the faster knowledge transfer will occur. Analysing their findings, Garcia-Almeida and Yu

(2015) also identified language skills and educational levels as important in terms of the absorptive capacity of the employees in the new units abroad. Peterson et al. (2003) in reference to the richness and type of knowledge, supported that objective knowledge that is acquired through standardised methods, such as market research, can be easily shared with units abroad and be replicated by other firms. They also suggested that when it comes to tacit knowledge, competitive firms can adopt an imitative learning approach with firms of high legitimacy, thus learning by observation. The transfer of tacit knowledge, apart from its complexity, can have an initial high cost related to codification (Cowan & Foray, 1997) and communication means. Apart from technological advancements and AI, which can have an impact on reducing codification and transfer associated costs, they can be further reduced in larger firms, due to the capability of scale economies and more disposable resources, which in turn can depend on the motivational attitudes of key management (De Correia et al., 2019; Peterson et al., 2003; Shiue et al., 2010). In terms of the motivational attitudes of the participating agents identified by Garcia-Almeida and Yu (2015), there is a difference between decision making, which seems to have a minor impact on knowledge transfer, and managerial discretion, which does have a higher significance in the process. The importance of managerial discretion lies in the fact that it is uncommon for company internationalisation heads to work in the foreign operational front of the organisation, thus not personally gaining experiential and market-specific knowledge (Peterson et al., 2003). Szulanski (1996) stated that because of this, knowledge transfer would benefit from the implementation of appropriate incentive mechanisms. Peterson et al. (2003) further support, that it is up to managerial motivation to set up reward and control structures in place, in order to support knowledge transfer. This would be of a critical importance to 'loosely coupled' organisations (which does apply to many multinationals), when there is different and sometimes contradictory knowledge produced in the various affiliates (Forsgren cited in Peterson et al., 2003). The facilitation of the process of knowledge transfer, can be easier in 'bottom-up' organisational formats with flat structures, as they support the immediate and successful sharing of first-hand knowledge (Barlett & Ghoshal, 2000). This also relates to the organisational commitment, which has also been identified as a critical factor, supporting the process of knowledge transfer (Shiue et al., 2010).

2.5.8 Knowledge flows

As part of the knowledge-based view of the internationalising organisation, knowledge flows are seen as part of the basis for achieving competitive advantage (Agbim & Idris, 2015). Knowledge flows within an organisation, occur along multiple directions (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). Schulz (2001, p. 662) defined knowledge flows as “the aggregate volume of know-how and information transmitted per unit of time”, in an effort to capture the overall amount of know-how and information transferred between subunits, in any possible way. He also identified two types of flows, horizontal and vertical. The horizontal knowledge flows carry knowledge from a unit to other peer units of the same organisation, while vertical flows refer to knowledge transfer from a unit to HQ. Effective knowledge flows between HQ, current and new units abroad can strengthen the competitive advantage as well as the long-term profitability of hospitality business on an international scale (Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015). Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) viewed organisational knowledge flows between HQ and foreign units as a mechanism, based upon the following five factors:

1. The value of the source unit’s knowledge stock
2. Motivational disposition of the source units
3. Existence and richness of transmission channels
4. Motivational disposition of the target unit
5. ACAP of the target unit

They also explained that both HQ and foreign unit can be the source or target unit, highlighting the importance of the individual within the process as facilitator. Huber (1991) supported that if an individual organisational member acquires information, then the organisation learns. According to Kwok and Gao (2005), all individuals within the internationalising organisation have their own ACAP, which they will use once motivated to do so. Bratianu (2015) agreed, arguing that an ‘emotional knowledge’, based on the individual’s previous education and experiences is what builds and maintains knowledge flows that link the individual ACAP and the organisational ACAP. Mahnke et al. (2005),

found that ACAP significantly influences subsidiary performance, through the establishment and maintenance of knowledge flows. Escribano et al. (2009), also support the importance of the organisational ACAP in maintaining knowledge flows, however they also explain that because of each unit's individual ACAP, the benefits that derive from the same amount of knowledge, might not be the same. Lindsay et al. (2003), further added to the role of the individual, the importance of relationships in order to maintain these flows. Relationships can be seen as part of the social capital of an organisation. According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998, p. 243), "social capital is the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit". Kim et al. (2013) supported that social capital is a key mechanism for achieving knowledge flows within a hotel organisation. Networks, as seen earlier in the literature review, have the ability to support learning, especially within the internationalisation process, by affecting foreign market selection and mode of entry (Sousa et al., 2021; Coviello & Munro, 1995). Establishing knowledge flows through relationships in new markets, support the development in those markets as well as new ones, by helping build even more useful relationships that support internationalisation (Fletcher & Harris, 2011). Using relationships to learn in new markets, supports the creation of network development routines within the organisation, which further help to build new networks and knowledge flows (Aguzzoli et al., 2021; Fletcher & Harris, 2011; Loane & Bell, 2006).

An examination of knowledge flows from a cultural perspective, further highlights how critical an individual's ability is to overcome cultural differences, in supporting knowledge flows, aiming to adapt services locally. Garcia-Almeida et al. (2011) looking at knowledge flows from an organisational perspective and a hotel chain context, stated that there are three factors that influence cultural compatibility in knowledge flows: location, previous group of employees, and the size of the new hotel. Magnini (2008) on the other hand, identified three different types of knowledge flows between different international joint venture hotel units and HQ as transfer, transformation and harvesting.

2.6 A theoretical research framework

This chapter aims to show how hotel chain learning mechanisms function during the internationalisation process, explaining the different types of knowledge, how they are acquired by the hotel chain with its overseas units, and how knowledge flows are directed to and from the units and HQ, through the construction of a theoretical framework that will assist in the research. The particular theoretical framework visually displays the current understandings of the relationships between the main concepts involved in this study, which will evolve and differentiate as the research is progressively carried out, providing valuable insights (Miles et al., 2018; Voss et al., 2002). Further to this, the present conceptual framework, is the starting point of the research (Yin, 2009) and also a point of reference that underlies the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The literature review on knowledge management, organisational learning, and internationalisation process theory, has informed this study and has provided the basis for a framework to understand the mechanisms and processes involved in the learning and managing of knowledge within the internationalisation efforts of hotel chains. The theoretical research framework presented in figure 2.11, utilises two main theories in organisational learning within the internationalisation process: Huber's (1991) organisational theory of learning, and Fletcher and Harris's (2011) knowledge acquisition content and sources complementing these two with explanations based on the literature, aiming to provide a better understanding of the processes involved.

Figure 2.11 shows the learning process stages at the centre of the HQ of the hotel chain, as well as within the two different units. These stages are: Knowledge acquisition, knowledge distribution, knowledge interpretation and organisational memory (Huber, 1991). These four stages are forming a cycle, as knowledge acquisition draws from the organisational memory (Huber, 1991; Karlsen et al., 2003; Slater & Narver, 1995). At the core of the learning cycle is the individual member of the hotel chain, that not only feeds into all processes, but also controls their flow, in terms of the richness, content and volume, as well through decisions and incentives (Andersson, 2000; Garcia-Almeida &

Yu, 2015; Hitt et al., 2001; Simons, 1995; Thompson et al., 2001). Although the two hotel units are in different countries, both organisational memories link to that of the hotel chain HQ (Bresman et al., 1999; Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Ingram & Baum, 2001), those knowledge flows however are affected by the entry mode choice, which can be seen in figure 2.11, acting as a filter. Although entry modes and their impact on knowledge transfer are not examined in this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that they will have an impact that may support or limit the knowledge flow from one unit to the other (Bresman et al., 1999; Erramilli & Rao, 1990; Eriksson et al., 2015; Malhotra, 2003). Similarly, the different hotel units, may also directly distribute information (knowledge), internally to different departments and externally, back into the HQs knowledge acquisition part (Bresman et al., 1999). The hotel chain HQ, as well as units 1 and 2, acquire knowledge internally and externally (Fletcher & Harris, 2012). Experiential knowledge may be the result of intentional direct experience (Huber, 1991), however it may also be acquired unintentionally or unsystematically through foreign operations, which allows management to learn from the results of past actions and re-apply those understandings to new situations (Fletcher & Harris, 2012). The literature has shown how current organisational actions abroad can provide experiential knowledge about those markets and operations, as well as networks and how to extract learnings from them (Blomstermo et al., 2004; Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 1990; Petersen et al., 2008). Internally, they may also draw objective knowledge from employees and systems (Fletcher & Harris, 2011). According to Huber (1991), management can develop knowledge by combining together different pieces of information and learnings that obtain internally. Hotel chain units may also acquire knowledge externally in both foreign markets 1 and 2. External experiential knowledge may be acquired through vicarious learning (Huber, 1991). This is done by observing others, through a specific mode of entry (Chandler & Lyon, 2009). Huber (1991) includes learning from networks as part of vicarious learning, however in figure 2.11 can be seen as a separate source of knowledge, due to the emphasis that has been placed upon them as an important source of different types of knowledge and support during internationalisation (Blomstermo et al., 2004; Hadley & Wilson, 2003). Grafting may provide experiential knowledge to the hotel chain knowledge acquisition part (Huber, 1991), through hiring employees with experience in particular markets or

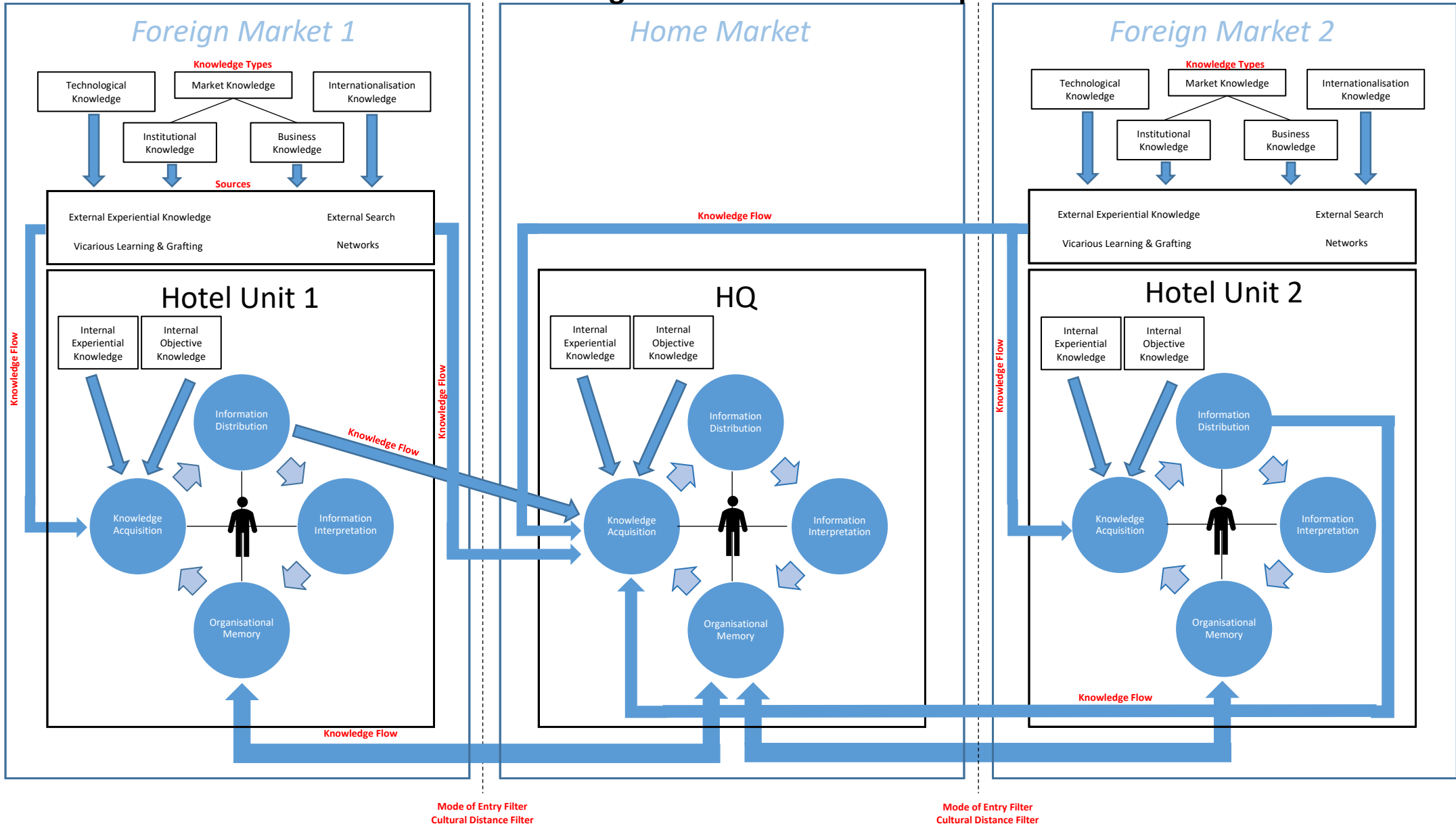
internationalisation in general, as well through acquiring new business units (Forsgren, 2002; Oviatt & McDougall, 1995). Finally, hotel chains may also be able to acquire knowledge through external search (Huber, 1991). This knowledge is mainly of an objective nature and includes the scanning of the external environment and directed searches for new information on markets (Huber, 1991; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Forsgren, 2002). According to Fletcher and Harris (2012), this includes published sources, marketing reports as well as other industry reports, trade publications, government outlet and trade association sources. Knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains has been categorised into the different types as identified by the literature: Technological knowledge (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Kogut & Zander, 1993; Oviatt & McDougal, 1994, 1995; Zahra et al., 2000;), market knowledge (institutional and business) (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 1990, 2003, 2009; Hadley & Wilson, 2003), as well as internationalisation knowledge (Blomstermo et al., 2004; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Forsgren, 2002; Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 2009).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has started with an introduction on the hotel industry and hotel chains in particular, exploring the literature on the internationalisation process from a services perspective. This has shown the high level of internationalisation within soft services as well as its special characteristics and presented the different perspectives and models explaining the process. Knowledge and learning within international business, play a crucial role, and the literature has identified it as an integral part of any international expansion effort, determining its success or failure. Further to this, the literature has identified the importance of experiential knowledge within organisational learning and the international business literature. Huber's (1991) work on organisational learning has provided a useful framework, outlining the processes of learning and integrating different types of knowledge. Based on this, and its further development from an international business perspective by Fletcher and Harris (2012), a conceptual framework was presented, in an effort to portray the current understanding of the literature around the phenomenon under investigation. This has also taken into consideration key theory on knowledge flows, ACAP, knowledge management and the

nature of knowledge in general and networks. The next chapter explains the methodology in addressing empirically the research question and objectives and inform the understanding of the phenomenon that has been framed by the literature review.

Figure 2.11: Theoretical framework to research hotel chain learning and knowledge management mechanisms during the internationalisation process



Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the research methodology adopted for the present thesis and explain why the specific methodology is the most appropriate, in order to tackle the particular research questions. Having identified a research gap and justified the need for the present study, the literature review has provided an understanding and number of insights into the issue of managing knowledge and learning of the internationalisation process of hotel chains. This chapter starts by introducing the philosophical and epistemological standpoints taken in order to carry out the study. It specifically looks into the nature of knowledge, explaining the significance of building a case study and the use of a qualitative data collection instrument, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. It also covers the ethical considerations of this research, explaining the steps taken. It further details how critical realism is utilised within the particular context, providing justification for the particular theoretical framework, as the most appropriate methodological approach, in an effort to understand the mechanisms of knowledge transfer and learning, within the internationalisation process of hotel chains. An analysis is provided for the reasons the particular hotel chains have been chosen to participate in this research as well as a justification for the sample size and as to the reason that hotel chain developers were targeted, as the most appropriate interviewees. The chapter provides an analysis of the research design and the data collection instrument with the reasons behind the way it was constructed, the approach, and process of the actual data collection. The data collection process is discussed, detailing the interview protocols. It continues with the way coding was done and the software that was used to process the data is presented. Finally, the methodology chapter closes with a word-count, exploring the interview results in terms of how many times and how many subject related words occurred during the interviews.

3.2 Research question, aim and objectives

The main aim of this study is to gain an understanding of how hotel chains learn and manage knowledge during the process of internationalising. For the purpose of understanding the different processes of learning, as well as those involved in the

management of knowledge obtained in foreign markets, three objectives have also been formulated, based on the literature analysis in chapter 2, as well as the pilot study, as seen below:

Research Question

“How do hotel chains learn and manage knowledge during the internationalisation process”

Research Aim

To understand how hotel chains, learn and manage knowledge during the internationalisation process.

Objectives

To understand how hotel chains, and their management development teams, capture, store, share/transfer and re-use knowledge obtained during foreign operations.

To identify the type of knowledge that is useful for hotel chains during internationalisation.

To understand the role of networks within the knowledge transfer process during internationalisation.

The literature review has provided the theoretical lenses, through which a conceptual framework was developed, depicting the possible mechanisms at play behind knowledge management and learning during the internationalisation process of hotel chains. The three objectives will help support the research, by directing the focus on interesting areas of the study that have been uncovered as significant within the analysis of the literature. The third objective, on the role of networks within the knowledge transfer process during internationalising, was added after conducting the pilot study,

which involved an in-depth interview, in an effort to confirm and test the validity and relevance of the research objectives and corresponding questions. Further details on the pilot study can be found in section 3.5.3 Research procedure/ Stage 3.

3.3 Research approach and philosophical assumptions

Burrell and Morgan (1979) stated that when it comes to social sciences research, it is of the utmost importance to clarify four sets of assumptions: ontological (the nature of reality), epistemological (the way knowledge is founded), human nature (the relationship between humans and their environment) and methodological (the way knowledge is obtained). Crotty (2003), expanding on this, suggested that in order to assess human knowledge, taking into consideration the status and value attributed to it, four research steps need to be analysed first: methods, methodology, theoretical perspective and epistemology.

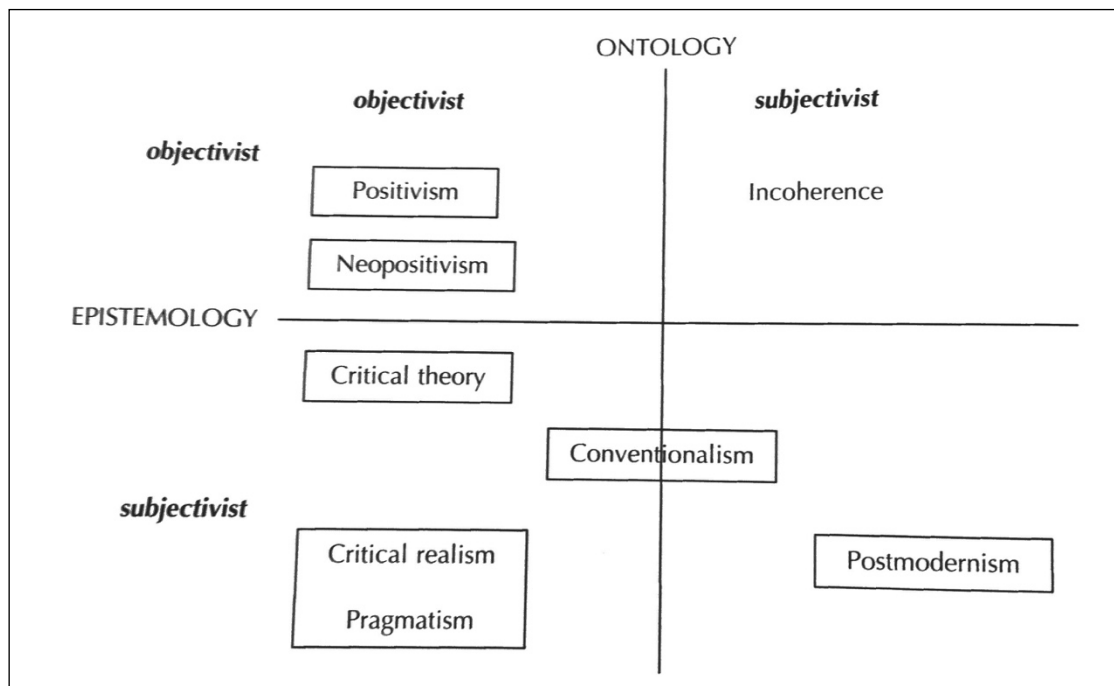
Starting with the main philosophical traditions, which are placed within the limits of positivism and phenomenology, they all seem to have different advantages and disadvantages, such their cost, scope, ease of conducting research and credibility (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The aim of the present study is to understand how hotel chains learn and manage knowledge during the internationalisation process. According to Crotty (2003), the nature of the research question and aim, guides the research. Based on the research aim and the nature of the research questions, the decision to follow a qualitative enquiry was adopted for the present thesis. Further to this, a qualitative approach was also supported through the identification of a research gap in the literature (Olsen & Roper 1998; Olivera 2000; Littlejohn et al., 2007; Ivanova et al., 2016), and the calls for further qualitative and comparative studies in understanding the particular process in general (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Fletcher & Harris 2012; Lindsay et al., 2003) and within the hotel industry in particular (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2016; Brock & Yaniv, 2007; Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz, 2020; Garcia-Almeida & Yu 2015; Ingram & Baum, 1997; Ivanova & Rahimi 2016; Knight, 1999; Olsen & Roper, 1998; Pinho & Prange, 2016).

Traditionally, hotel chains, which in the particular scenario is the organisation type that will be researched, have a multi levelled hierarchical structure, which can be very complex, especially if further layers of organisational power structures are taken into consideration in this, such as the relationships between HQs and individual units. Looking into the concepts of knowledge and experience and gaining an understanding of the organisational processes, would require an in-depth investigation of all these different layers. As the pilot study provided evidence of underlying networks that affect knowledge transfer within the organisation, an approach that will uncover these would be most suitable. Siting between positivism and interpretivism, critical realism (Archer, 2016) which is increasingly being used in management research, seems to offer the advantages of a multilayer approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Sousa & Castro, 2010). Critical realism allows for the examination of the nature of structure, relations, causation and agency (Archer et al., 2016), something of particular use in this present study, due to the different mechanisms that seem to be at play, affecting the process of learning and transferring knowledge within the hotel chain internationalisation process. Clark (2012) further supports this, by explaining that critical realism is ideal when exploring research questions that aim to facilitate the understanding of a phenomenon. In the present study, the knowledge and learning mechanisms of hotel chains during internationalisation are explored, and are accepted as objective realities, independently of the awareness and knowledge of the researcher. The investigation of this, through addressing the traditional concerns of social research and examining them from a critical perspective and under an objective ontological light, will provide an interpretation, shedding some more light into the mechanisms and processes of learning and knowledge management of hotel chains during internationalisation. One of the advantages of using a critical realist ontology, is the layered approach it offers. Critical realism offers three different domains within its' enquiry approach (Bhaskar, 1978; Clark, 2012; Easterby-Smith et al., 2012; Sharpe, 2018). These layers are: the empirical domain, which includes the experiences and understanding that people have; the actual, which includes all actions and events that take place, independently of the researcher; the real, which includes mechanisms and processes that cannot be detected directly but do have an impact on the individuals involved. The advantage of this critical layered approach to social constructionism, is that it provides an objectivity to the research

through the fact that it views the same phenomena from different perspectives (Easton, 2010). This approach is more likely to reveal the ‘real’ or ‘actual’, which may not always be capable of being observed.

Crotty (2003) supports that epistemology sits alongside ontology, although critical realists place the ontological questions before any epistemological questions can be asked (Ackroyd & Karlsson 2014). Using Johnson's and Duberley's two axes matrix (2000) (figure 3.1), which compares objectivist and subjectivist stances on ontologies and epistemologies, the current research, stemming from a realist stance, would fall within the bottom left quadrant, of objectivist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. The present thesis views the nature of knowledge and experiential knowledge within the internationalisation process of hotel chains as an exogenous variable, that can be codified, measured, stored and accessed by anyone (in the hotel development management team as well as HQ General Management) at any time. This view is supported by several authors and researchers, such as the work done by Bontis et al. (2002) on organisational learning; Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) and Donaldson (2001), treating organisational knowledge as consisting of objective facts, which is also in line with the tenets of critical realism.

Figure 3.1: Ontology vs epistemology matrix



Source: Johnson and Duberley (2000)

When it comes to research design, critical realism aims to explain why certain phenomena occur, focusing thus first on theory. According to Vincent and O'Mahoney (2018), a critical realism research design aims to explain and theorise about the outcomes themselves, as well as the context and underlying mechanisms that play a role in the occurrence of those phenomena. Potential generalisations therefore, are taken from an empirical context to a theoretical one, differing thus from a positivistic paradigm, that allows for generalisations based on an empirical population (Danermark, 2002 in Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). As theoretical generalisations can explain why, to what extent, and in which circumstances a phenomenon may occur, can be more enduring and can also be applied through time and space (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). The present thesis therefore benefits from a critical realist research design, that aims to help understand and explain, supporting thus the research question and objectives, rather than a research design approach that would provide generalisations that note only the empirical instances and have a restricted explanatory capacity.

Although critical realism supports an objective ontology, it allows for a flexible and inclusive epistemological framework. Bhaskar (1978) distinguished world into 'intransitive' and 'transitive'. While an intransitive view of the world supports that the world objectively exists, a transitive view supports a construction of that reality, based on the individual human lenses (Houston, 2014), and that knowledge is subjective, transitive and constantly changes (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2018). This flexibility of critical realism and the emphasis on ontological questions (what is X? how does it work?), rather than epistemological ones (how can we know X?), provides a wide range of methodological approaches to the researcher (Karlsson & Ackroyd, 2014), which allows for the collection of different types of data, depending on what the researcher finds of importance (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2018). The researcher therefore may adapt several different methods of collecting data, ranging from questionnaires, to interviews, or direct observation, at different time periods or combining information from different sources. It seems that following specific methodological rules is not an end in itself for critical realists, and if one research method does not work, or is not available, a different one may be used, depending on the researchers' intellectual creativity (Karlsson &

Ackroyd, 2014). The main aim of critical realist research is to help manage and explore areas that are seen particularly important in assisting the researcher understand the particular phenomenon. The thesis, takes an intransitive view of knowledge viewing it as objective, in line with previous research conducted within the field of knowledge within the internationalisation process of hotels (Aizpurua et al., 2011; Alonso-Almeida et al., 2016; Altinay, 2005; Bayraktaroglu & Kutanis, 2002; Chen & Dimou, 2005; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz, 2020; Garcia-Almeida et al., 2011; Garcia-Almeida et al., 2015; Kyriakidou & Gore, 2005; Lindsay et al., 2003; Pine & Qi, 2004; Ubeda-Garcia, et al., 2021).

When it comes to the actual method of collecting data, the present study adopted a case study research, involving semi-structured in-depth interviews and secondary organisational information. According to Smith and Elger (2012), critical realism supports a case study research design, as it takes into consideration actors' discourses and negotiated meanings as well as specific and generic social processes in context, supporting therefore the explorations of the critical realism domains. Karlsson and Ackroyd (2014) support the same, explaining that case study research will uncover particular causal mechanisms and structures, while making use of the context of the particular organisation. Further to this, a case study approach offers a great tool in assessing the complexity of the hotel chain multi-layered hierarchy and structure, due to the difficulties that are presented when it comes to access and thoroughness. This is because a case study can include a single or small number of organisations, which in turn can provide a great deal of mainly qualitative data, providing an understanding of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Easton, 2010; Farquhar, 2012). Ghauri (2004) highlights the usefulness of case studies within international business research, due to the flexibility they offer in terms of epistemological approaches and also their ability to shed light in areas that have not been fully explored by the literature. As the research questions and objectives of the particular thesis are definable in terms of the questions: 'how' and 'why', a case study analysis is more suited due to its explanatory nature (Easton, 2010; Yin, 2003).

As mentioned above, the method or tool for collecting data in order to build the case study, involved semi-structured in-depth interviews and examining online organisational documents and reports. According to Easton (2010), semi-structured interviews are used very often within case study research, due to the strength of this method in being very flexible. Interviewing fits well within a critical realist case study approach (Smith & Elger, 2014), as it allows an in-depth insight into structures and mechanisms that cannot be directly observed, while capturing the experiences of the actors involved (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). This, as well as the possibility of creating theory-driven questions (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), further allow the interviewer to assess the relationships between underlying causal processes, the different contexts in which these processes take place, and the resulting expected or unexpected outcomes, thus probing the multi-layered character of the world, as per the critical realist ontology (Smith & Elger, 2014).

Figure 3.2: Research Design



Source: Author

3.3.1 The nature of knowledge

Plato considered knowledge, not as a product of perception, but as a product of reasoning (Russel, 1972). Since then, several other philosophers supported the idea that

people could not reach truth through their senses, as they do not have the capacity to do that, and that the mind was the ultimate way to truth, via realising existence first (Russel, 1972). The Cartesian paradigm made a shift, from cognitive knowledge to rational knowledge (Bratianu, 2015). Based on Descartes' argument, Ryle (2000), distinguished 'knowing' into 'knowing how' and 'knowing that', placing emphasis on the importance of both cognitive and rational knowledge. He argued that knowing is not static, but it can restructure and improve. He stated that 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' can work in tandem and produce better results, thus highlighting the need of cognitive knowledge, as part of human knowledge. Polanyi (1983), as seen in the literature review, took these concepts further, introducing the tacit dimension of knowledge. He emphasised its importance and argued that perception is a product of tacit knowing, due to the experiences obtained through the bodily senses, as the body "is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether intellectual or practical" (Polanyi, 1983, p. 15). He explained further however that all these experiences obtained, having been transformed into tacit knowledge, remain unknown to the person that holds them, as they are now stored in the area of the cognitive unconscious. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) define the cognitive unconscious as "the realm of thought that is completely and irrevocably inaccessible to direct conscious introspection". Nonaka (1994), explored the concept of tacit knowledge further, analysing it within the context of both western and eastern cultures. Similarly, he supported the view that tacit knowledge remains trapped into the unconscious part of the mind. This is what Polanyi (1983) meant, when he argued that people know more than they can tell. Nonaka, continuing on this in his work with Takeuchi (1995, p. 8), explained that "tacit knowledge is highly personal and hard to formalise, making it difficult to communicate or to share with others. Subjective insights, intuitions, and hunches fall into this category of knowledge (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Furthermore, tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in an individual's action and experience, as well as in the ideals, values, or emotions he or she embraces". Tacit knowledge, therefore, is highly personal and difficult to express it or transfer it (Bratianu, 2015). Having identified the importance and role of the individual within the process of knowledge creation and transfer (Bratianu, 2015; Casillas et al., 2015; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka, 1994; Walsh & Ungson, 1991; Yang, 2007), together with the embedded nature of tacit knowledge, the use of a qualitative

approach in this research presents several advantages. This approach is further supported not only by the significance of the role of the individual within the process, but also by the complexity that such a variable pose, due to the obstacles that extracting tacit knowledge presents. As tacit knowledge is extremely important for the success of businesses (Hilmersson, 2014; Madsen, 2005), the obstacles in extracting it and transferring it, from employee to employee and also from HQ level to unit as well as the opposite, and unit to unit, are numerous, ranging from cultural compatibility to absorptive capacity and motivational attitudes (Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015).

On the other hand, as seen in the literature review, knowledge that is able to penetrate the conscious part of a human, is known as explicit or objective knowledge (Polanyi, 1983). Explicit and tacit knowledge are both parts of Nonaka's knowledge dyad, which although seem to be equally important in knowledge creation, internationalisation literature has placed more importance on the tacit dimension of knowledge (Andersson & Karlsson, 2004; Blomstermo & Choi, 2003; Bratianu, 2015; Hilmersson, 2014; Madsen, 2005; Petersen et al., 2003; Rammal et al., 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2010). Some authors use the term 'implicit' to describe tacit knowledge that could potentially become explicit and prefer to use the term 'tacit' for tacit knowledge that cannot become explicit (Munoz et al., 2015). For the purposes of this thesis, the term tacit will be used to describe knowledge gained through experience during internationalisation activities, and explicit for objective internationalisation knowledge that can be extracted, stored and transferred. This approach has been used by several different authors, exploring the phenomenon of business internationalisation, and hotel chain internationalisation in particular (Johansson & Vahlne, 1977).

Building on the analysis of the nature of knowledge and the research questions and objectives of this study, which aim to tackle 'what', 'how' and 'why', a qualitative research strategy will help answer such enquiries (Crotty, 2003) and thus contribute to theory. The nature of these questions itself is an ideal approach, in order to guide the research, participants share their stories on learning and knowledge management in the hotel chain internationalisation process. This position is strengthened by the acknowledgement of the role and significance of the individual in knowledge creation,

transfer, management and organisational learning within the services sector, as seen in the literature analysis. Further to this, as previously mentioned, Bhaskar (1975) made a distinction between the 'transitive' and 'intransitive' dimensions of knowledge. The transitive dimension of knowledge would be the physical processes and social phenomena, as well as theories and discourse, while the intransitive dimension would be the domain of being, existing regardless of whether the human mind knows them or not (Sayer, 2000). From a critical realist perspective, this distinction indicates that the world should not be mixed with the human experience of it, which is an essential factor distinguishing critical realist from empirical realism, which identifies the world with the empirical. It is interesting to also note, that the fact that critical realism accepts that knowledge is transitive, means that the theory that might be developed in the light of this research might change in time, by extending it, modifying it or rejecting it all together, exactly as the understanding of the particular phenomenon can change (Haigh et al., 2019).

3.3.2 Limitations, researcher-bias and reflexivity

The development of this chapter made it clear that depending on the methodological approach a researcher adopts, as well as the corresponding philosophical assumptions that come with it, they would be seen as a limitation by those in favour of an opposing or different approach, and a strength by those in favour of it. It is however acknowledged that certain limitations arose during the course of this research. One key restraint was the availability of resources, both for secondary and primary research. As seen in the literature review, the research on knowledge and learning within hotel internationalisation is limited and scarce. Access to research participants was also a key limitation, with the main reason being the actual identification of them within the businesses, due to the 'HQ nature' of their role and secondly their availability. The research participant profile and the reasons that they were identified as the best source of information for this research, can be found further on in section 3.5.4 Stage 4.

During the data collection process, the researcher needs to be reflexive about the theories and mechanisms that they might be working with, as a basis to help them

understand certain phenomena. The researcher also needs to be reflexive about the inherent biases, thoughts and assumptions that he or she might have, and which will have an effect on the data collection, as well as any future concepts or theories that they might develop in an effort to better understand the particular phenomenon (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Not clarifying the relationship between the researcher and the object examined (Brannick & Coghlan, 2006), and being unaware of the origins of the assumptions followed, would be seen as poor practice (Johnson & Duberley, 2003). The philosophical assumptions adopted as well as the methodological steps followed are described and explained in detail in this chapter. According to Harding (1987), reflexivity can be differentiated into two different forms: methodological reflexivity, and epistemic reflexivity. Methodological reflexivity is the one concerned with the monitoring of the behavioural impact upon the surrounding environment, which is explored, as well as the particular steps followed and their effectiveness. Johnson and Duberley (2003), explain that both types of reflexivity are valuable and would be most useful when used in conjunction. They also support however, that such an undertaking would be difficult. According to the same authors, critical realism, which is the assumption followed for the present study, follows an 'epistemic' approach towards reflexivity, which supports a greater understanding of the complex and ongoing relationship between the researcher and the study.

The author has both operational and management experience within the hotel industry and international hotel chains, as well as lecturing in the same field and international business in general. Critical realism approaches all previous knowledge and understanding as being heavily loaded with theory, which in this case would be a combination of industry experience and theory as explained above. Although these would form and shape the lenses the researcher uses, objective uninfluenced observations, performed without any assumptions of theory would be impossible (Ryan et al., 2012). Critical realism does not claim an entirely objective research path (Johnson & Duberley, 2003). Indeed, theory helped frame the present thesis and certain key themes sensitised the author to focus on particular elements of the topic of KM and OL within the internationalisation of hotel chains, as seen in the objectives in the beginning of this chapter (Danemark et al., 2019). The standard literature review in chapter two,

has identified gaps in the understanding of the particular phenomenon. It has also uncovered different realistic theories and mechanisms, that were combined into a conceptual framework, which requires further study within the particular context and research area of learning and knowledge within hotel internationalisation. According to Vincent and O'Mahoney (2018), the process of examining the existing literature and picking the realistic theories as well as identifying the mechanisms that a researcher might expect to be in action, follows a critical realist approach. In this particular case, the researcher identified certain theories, related to internationalisation in general, hotel chain internationalisation in particular, as well as several others related to knowledge management and transfer, organisational learning and the role of networks. Further to this, the author was mindful of his personal practitioner experiences in the industry, obtained while working for both local and international hotel chains on an operational level, including efforts to internationalise and efforts to open new properties abroad. The author was also aware of the relationships developed while in the industry, which although helped with interview access, can be considered as another theoretical lens, allowing for more insights (Ryan et. al., 2012).

Despite the fact that the theories, experience and understanding of the researcher, did play a role in guiding this research, the design of this study allowed for higher levels of theoretical sensitivity. Following a critical realism approach, the employment of an abductive research design encouraged the use of theoretical lenses to sensitise the researcher to uncover not only a certain type of data, but also data of interest that arose during the course of the collection process (Ryan et al., 2012). The author ensured that the interviews were semi-structured and the questions of a generic nature, although somewhat focusing on the area of interest, yet still allowing for the interviewees the opportunity to 'tell their story'. This allowed for other interesting data to surface, revealing hidden structures and a more complete picture to emerge. An example of this is that during the pilot study the importance of networks, relationships and 'weak ties', for the exchange of knowledge within the world of international hotel expansion, became apparent and although not a major theme at the start of this research, it was added as one of the research objectives. The rest of interviewees confirmed this as a theme of importance.

Although using interviews to build a case study can provide great insights, they do have some limitations too, which are presented in the discussion on qualitative research. When it comes to reflexivity, some of these limitations have to do with human agency and the preoccupations, backgrounds and levels of attentiveness that different interviewees carry, as well as various cultural and structural forces that might have had an effect on them (Smith & Elger, 2012). This has sometimes been taken to mean that when interviewing using a critical realist approach, the data do not reveal as much about the social world, due to their applied and situated understanding, using cultural elements to produce morally adequate stories (Alvesson, 2011 in Smith & Elger, 2012). The author has made an effort to follow the principle of 'conversational collaboration' with the interviewees, by remaining receptive, not intentionally evaluating what is being said, and allowing for them to complete their 'story-telling' without interruptions (Archer, 2003). This way, human reflexivity is drawn out and analysed through the interview, while remaining within the grounds of a personal and 'inner-conversation' frame (Smith & Elger, 2012).

This study aims to explore knowledge and learning management, during the internationalisation process of hotel chains through the lenses of critical realism and the use of a case study and interviews, in an effort to better understand it. It is possible however for another researcher to develop a different conceptual framework, taking into consideration other variables and thus arriving at different conclusions. Although this research does not aim at producing a study that is generalisable and leads to theory creation, it is possible for future researchers to undertake similar studies, expanding on the findings. The limitations of this study in terms of the methodology followed are discussed further in Chapter 6.

3.4 Research methodology

Based on the analysis and conclusions of the literature review, an inductive view was adopted for the present study. As the present thesis aims to understand (*verstehen*), rather than to explain (*erklaren*) (Crotty, 2003), the process of learning and managing

knowledge within the internationalisation process of hotel chains, a qualitative approach would be ideal. This approach has allowed for an exploratory framework to collect data, which supported a better understanding of the particular phenomenon. The lack of clear and consistent literature and research on this topic, favours an exploratory approach, which aims to contribute insights and a better understanding of the investigated situation (Flick, 2007).

As explained above, when it comes to the philosophical assumptions that were followed, critical realism is particularly useful, as it places an emphasis on understanding reality and explaining why things happen (Clark, 2012; Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018).

The research involved a case study research strategy, in order to assess the research question and employed a qualitative method, looking at different business structural levels (Eisenhardt, 1989). There are three main types of case study research, a single-case design, a multiple-case design and an embedded-research design (Yin, 2009). A multiple-case design is preferable for the purposes of the present research, as it provides more analytical benefits (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), a case study approach is well suited in situations when the form of the research question is how and why, and it does not require control over behavioural events and focuses on contemporary events. It further helps to identify a contemporary phenomenon in detail, within its real-life frame, and it is ideal for situations when the limits between phenomenon and context are blurred and not clear. Ghauri (2004) further favours the use of case studies when trying to optimise the understanding of a particular phenomenon.

The research focuses on comparing the data generated from building a case, drawing from different positions within the development teams of selected international hotel chain companies (hotel chain names has been anonymised as per SHU ethics). Semi structured interviews are used in order to understand the processes and the significance of actions (Djuric et al., 2010). The interviews were done with different members of development teams that deal with international expansion and sit within the hotel chain corporate offices. In order to build a round case for the different hotel companies, the

levels of responsibility are assessed within the hotel chain development team (Head, Director and Manager), as well as data from their websites, such as the team hierarchy, structure and location.

In the particular case, of the role of knowledge and learning management within the internationalisation efforts of hotel chains, a critical realist case study approach is well suited, as it supports a multi-layered approach and according to Easton (2010), is particularly effective when it comes to phenomena such as organisations, networks within hierarchies and inter-organisational relationships. Further to this, elements of the phenomenon of knowledge management and learning during the internationalisation process of hotel chains, have been investigated in previous research through single embedded and multiple case studies (Aguzzoli et al., 2021; Altinay, 2005; Bayraktaroglu & Kutanis, 2002; De Correia et al., 2019; Czyzewska, 2016; Lindsay et al., 2003; Littlejohn et al., 2007; Ninerola et al., 2016; Zhao & Olsen, 1997), allowing for an in-depth investigation of it, and the provision of rich and complex insights (Bayraktaroglu & Kutanis, 2002; Lindsay et al., 2003; Zhao & Olsen, 1997).

In terms of the research population, the target are individuals that are directly involved in the internationalisation process of hotel chains by directing it, facilitating learning and also handling the knowledge that is obtained, when planning and entering new markets abroad. These individuals would also be involved in storing, sharing and reusing this internationalisation knowledge and learnings. The group of individuals that bear all of these elements is the international development teams of hotel chains, involved in opening and establishing new units in new foreign markets. The task of the internationalisation process within hotel chains is exclusively handled by these teams, which can sometimes be categorized by geographical areas, for example: EMEA (Europe, Middle East & Africa), Americas (the entire American continent) or Americas and Canada and Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Asia Pacific. Other hotel chain departments might assist during the process of internationalisation, however their role is supportive and not leading. A justification and analysis of the research participants profiles follows, in chapter 4.

The pilot research showed that semi-structured interviews are an effective tool and was in effect utilised for the purposes of this study. These were used in conjunction with data retrieved from the company websites. The interviews were conducted on different levels within the hierarchy of development teams (see below in figure 3.3, as an example of a hierarchy of a hotel organisation).

Figure 3.3: Hotel chain structure example

European branch of international development of participant hotel chain



Source: Participant hotel chain website

In the particular example in figure 3.3, two different sources that provided interviews for the research are: The Vice President of Development (UK & Ireland) and the Development Manager & Feasibility (Europe). It is interesting to note, that in the particular example, the region of responsibility changes and becomes wider as the hierarchy funnels down to the lowest level, which traditionally is not the case. This observation is of particular interest in terms of knowledge transfer, communication channels and networks.

The interviews were conducted over the telephone and lasted for approximately an hour each. They involved a series of questions from the interviewer (20) and were recorded using SHU equipment (Cisco telephone speaker and iPod). The interviews were booked via email, through the development team secretary, having firstly explained the research involved, as well as all ethical parameters, which are analysed within this chapter.

3.4.1 Critical realism

From positivism to postmodernism, research has gone through many stages of development through the years, to reach today's pluralism. There have been several attempts to create a clear, straight and correct way of accessing social reality and discovering truth, but this has proved to be very difficult, with philosophers revisiting their own views and challenging them (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). A positivist research stance would focus on the investigation of a particular phenomenon by testing a hypothesis and generalizing on the data analysis findings. From a different perspective, a phenomenological stance would focus on a deeper and more detailed understanding, in an effort to answer questions such as how, why and what (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). While the positivist approach employs more quantitative research methods, such as surveys, the phenomenological approach tends to use more qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews (for the distinct differences between the two approaches, please see table 3.1). It is however important to highlight the fact that although these two basic research approaches seem to be incompatible, when a researcher starts gathering and analysing data, these differences are by no means so clear cut and distinct (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

Table 3.1: Differences between Positivism and Phenomenology

Key areas	Positivism	Phenomenology
Core Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world is external and objective • The observer is independent • Science is value-free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world is socially constructed and subjective • The researcher is part of what is observed • Science is driven by human interests and motives

Research Endeavour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facts • Causality and fundamental laws • The reduction of phenomena to simple elements • Create a hypothesis and then test it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on meanings • Work on understanding • Observe the totality of a situation • Develop ideas through induction from data
Research Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured, formal and detailed plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolving and flexible
Involvement of the Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher remains distanced from the materials being researched • Short-term contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher gets involved with the phenomena being researched • Emphasis on trust and empathy, and long-term contact
Preferred Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concepts are operationalised so that they can be measured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena
Sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large Samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small samples but investigated in depth or over time
Data collection methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiments, surveys, structures interviews and observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation, documentation, open-ended and semi-structured interviews
Research Instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires, scales, test scores and experimentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide coverage of the range of situations • Greater opportunity for researcher to retain control of research process • Clarity about what is to be investigated and therefore data collection can be fast and more cost effective • Helps to generalize previous research findings and test previously developed hypotheses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to look at change processes over time • Can understand people's meanings • Can adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge • Can contribute to the evolution of new theories • Provides a way of gathering data which is

		natural rather than artificial
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods tend to be rather inflexible and artificial • Not effective in understanding processes or the significance that people attach to actions • Not very helpful in generating theories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection takes a great deal of time and resources • Difficulty of analysis of qualitative data • Harder for the researcher to control the research process • Reliability problem with the findings

Source: Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al. (2012)

Management research, underpinned by management education which seems to be heavily sustaining management practice (Grey & Mitev, 1995), is dominated to a certain extent by a positivist epistemology (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). This seems to have been unavoidable, since positivism has its roots on common sense, experience and observation: the first human tools of intellect to try and make sense of the world they lived in. The great escape from the darkness of the medieval times and a metaphysical world view, enforced a strict and hard line of assessing truth and creating knowledge. A distinct paradigm was therefore developed over the last two centuries that helped scientific research to advance and established the basis for all future thinking.

Examining the dominant and most common research approach within the topic of KM, organisational learning and knowledge transfer within hotel chain internationalisation, most publications would be located within the north-west quadrant of Johnson's and Duberley's two axes matrix (2000), which compares objectivist and subjectivist stances on ontologies and epistemologies (figure 3.1). The north-west quadrant is that of objectivist ontology and an objectivist epistemology. A very small part of the research conducted belongs to the south-west quadrant, which again has objectivist ontology, but a subjectivist epistemology. It is interesting to note that the ontology remains objectivist in both cases. It is therefore evident the fact that management research, within the field of hospitality internationalisation and knowledge management and learning, is heavily influenced by an objectivist approach, following the traditional norm

within social sciences. Another interesting trend seems to be the increase of qualitative studies within the particular topic, starting from 2005 until now, involving interviews and constructing case studies (Altinay, 2005; Brookes et al., 2011; Czyzewska, 2016; De Correia et al., 2019; Gross et al., 2017; Ninerola et al., 2016; Sutthijakra, 2012). According to LittleJohn et al. (2007), a more qualitative and internalised approach was needed in order to understand the phenomenon of hotel internationalisation in more depth. Critical realism follows these generic epistemological and ontological labels and thus supporting this mainstream research approach that has been developing over time within the particular research area.

Table 3.2: Comparing the ontological and epistemological approaches taken in research in KM and learning during hotel internationalisation

Authors	Title	Epistemology	Ontology
Bayraktaroglu & Kutanis (2002)	Transforming hotels into learning organisations: a new strategy for going global	Subjectivist Single case study involving in-depth interviews	Objectivist
Lindsay, et al. (2003)	Relationships, the role of individuals and knowledge flows in the internationalisation of service firms	Subjectivist Case study approach involving a CIT (Critical incident technique) methodology, consisting of interviews and observations.	Objectivist
Jones et al. (2004)	The relationship between generic theory and hospitality applied research: the case of international hotel development	Objectivist Statistical analysis of data to test the hypotheses formulated through literature review. Secondary data on 512 hotels using transaction cost analysis	Objectivist
Yang (2004a)	Quantitative knowledge capturing and organizational learning: two case studies in Taiwan hotels	Subjectivist Case study approach, involving semi-interviews at two different hotels	Objectivist

Yang (2004b)	Job-related knowledge sharing: comparative case studies	Subjectivist Case study approach, involving semi-interviews at two different hotels	Objectivist
Yang & Wan (2004)	Advancing organizational effectiveness and knowledge management implementation	Subjectivist Semi-structured interviews	Objectivist
Chen & Dimou (2005)	Expansion strategy of international hotel firms	Objectivist Formulation of hypotheses and testing them through statistical analysis of secondary data from 19 international hotel brands	Objectivist
Altinay (2005)	Factors Influencing Entry Mode Choices: Empirical Findings from an International Hotel Organisation	Subjectivist In-depth single case study involving semi structured interviews, coding of answers and categorization)	Objectivist
Kyriakidou & Gore (2005)	Learning by example Benchmarking organizational culture in hospitality, tourism and leisure SMEs	Subjectivist Interviews within an extreme case sampling approach)	Objectivist
Brock & Yaniv (2007)	Knowledge is not enough: organisational attention and replication strategies	Objectivist Literature review and presentation of a conceptual framework and hypotheses, treating knowledge as an external objective and measurable variable	Objectivist
Aizpurua et al. (2011)	Learning for sharing: an empirical analysis of organizational learning and knowledge sharing	Objectivist Survey	Objectivist
García-Almeida et al. (2011)	Cultural compatibility in internal knowledge transfers: an application to hotel chain growth	Objectivist Survey	Objectivist
Garcia-Almeida & Yu (2015)	Knowledge Transfer in Hotel Firms: Determinants of Success in International Expansion	Objectivist Survey measuring knowledge transfer success	Objectivist
Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016)	Human and other critical factors in organizational learning	Objectivist Survey	Objectivist

	in the hotel industry: A contingency approach		
Czyżewska (2016)	The role of knowledge transference in the process of internationalisation. The case of the London Hilton	Subjectivist Single case study involving archival analysis and interviews	Subjectivist
Niñerola et al. (2016)	The experience of Meliá Hotels International in China: A case of internationalisation of a Spanish hotel group	Subjectivist Case Study	Objectivist
De Correia et al. (2019)	Entrepreneurial approaches to the internationalisation of Portugal's hotel industry	Subjectivist (multi-case study using semi-structured interviews and secondary data)	Objectivist
Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz (2020)	Successful replication of knowledge in the growth of service organizations: evidence from Spanish hotel chains	Objectivist (Quantitative approach, using a survey)	Objectivist
Ubeda-Garcia et al. (2021)	The impact of knowledge management on the internationalization, organizational ambidexterity and performance of Spanish hotel chains	Objectivist (Quantitative: survey of 70 hotel chains applying variance-based structural equation modelling)	Objectivist

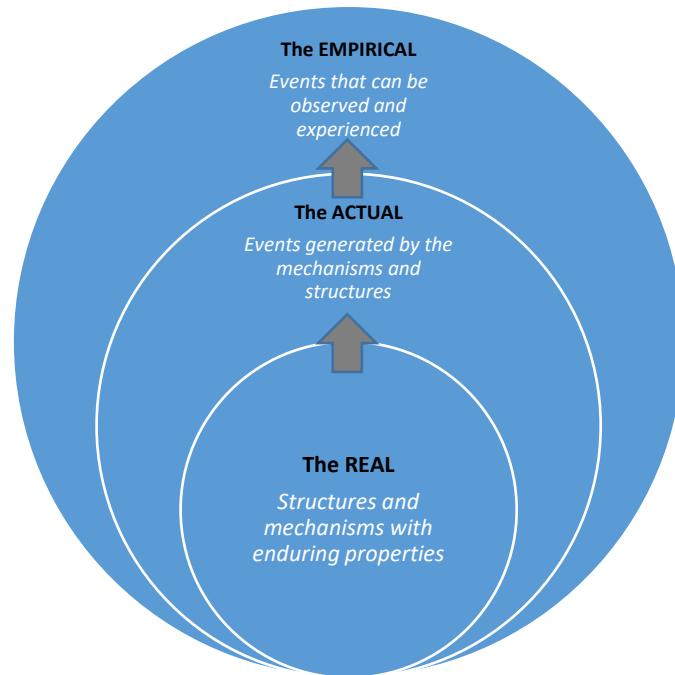
Source: Developed using Littlejohn et al. (2007) and Hallin & Marnburg (2008)

Although critical realism is very similar to social constructionism in the sense that it accepts that the world is socially constructed, it further supports that reality is also a critical element, which plays a major role and needs to be taken into consideration (Sayer, 2000). Social phenomena are accepted as having a real impact, independently from the researcher, and these social phenomena can be generated by the actions of individuals and also have an external impact on the same (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2000). According to Easton (2010), critical realism accepts the possibility of knowing reality, while social constructionism rejects it, as it focuses on the constructions of individuals.

Critical realism supports that truth can be difficult to be expressed in words, yet it cannot be absolute (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). It stands between the subjectivist rationale of relativism and the objectivist approach of positivism. It sees reality as being complex, highlighting the role of mechanisms that affect human behaviour as well as the role of agency (Clark, 2012). It also distances itself from the other approaches within the realism paradigm, such as empirical realism, which according to Bhaskar (1978), limits a researcher's understanding of reality, through focusing on what can be known.

The objective of critical realism, is to focus deeper, exploring the underlying structures and identifying the causal dynamics that are routed under transitive empirical patterns (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Under a critical realist approach, it is these causal dynamics and universal mechanisms that produce events, and although they might not be directly observable, their conceptual recognition or retroduction can explain why these occur (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). This also means that reality can have an ontological substance, without being experienced by everyone (Houston, 2014), which is due to the 'stratified' view of the world (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). According to Clark (2012), critical realism is well suited in research that aims to understand processes. Bhaskar (1978) explains these structures and mechanisms, as interdependent layers or domains: 'the real', which contains all these underlying structures and in turn lead to 'the actual', which contains all the events triggered by the real, which in turn lead to 'the empirical' containing all the events that can be actually observed and experienced (Mingers, 2004). The empirical domain focuses on the human perspectives of the world, or more specifically, the actual and real domains, which can only be perceived fallibly (Clark, 2012).

Figure 3.4: The three layers/ domains of the real



Source: Bhaskar (1978)

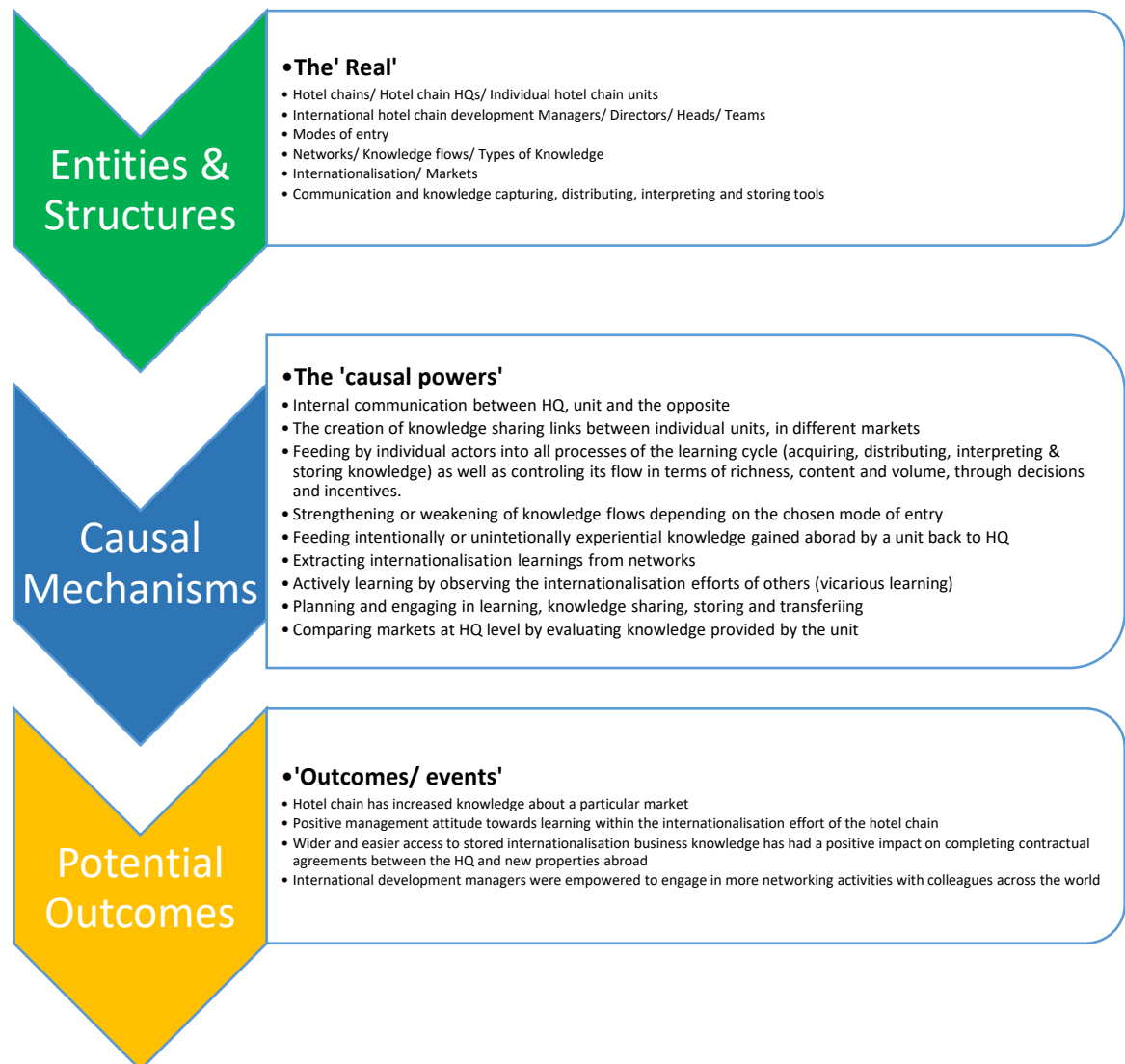
There has been criticism on critical realism. One of the key issues lies with the validity of the observations, stemming from the objectivity of the experiences and whether someone can identify the real and the actual as facts or would they be mere fictions (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). The idea that these underlying processes and events are unobservable, comes in conflict with substantiating knowledge claims about them. Further to this, critical realist researchers are sometimes seen as not being able to perform quantitative or qualitative research properly, due to their eclectic approach in the methods of collecting data and choosing what really works in helping them understand a phenomenon, rather than sticking to a traditional way of doing this (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2018). Karlsson and Ackroyd (2014) however, argue that there are recurrent general designs in critical realist research, that researchers tend to use, against others. They further suggest that these particular designs are used, as they are based on an abductive or retroductive logic of exploration. An abductive approach aims to "re-describe the observable everyday objects of social science (usually provided by interviewees or observational data) in an abstracted and more general sense in order to describe the sequence of causation that gives rise to observed regularities in the pattern of events" (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2018, p. 17). It can therefore mix observations

together with concepts that were presented in the literature analysis, in an effort to create possible explanations of the structures and mechanisms that cause specific events. A retroductive approach aims to “ascertain what the world (i.e. the broader context) must be like in order for the mechanisms we observe to be as they are and not otherwise” (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2018, p. 17). The first step requires identifying patterns over different time periods and also within different contexts, asking ‘what if?’ in order to see if there are any underlying causal structures. Retroduction also implies a commitment to theoretical pluralism, as different theoretical viewpoints can be considered in order to understand all different influences that may be influencing the observations of the researcher. Both abductive and retroductive approaches therefore, can provide a deeper understanding of the relationships between the mechanisms and structures that have been observed within the given contexts. O’Mahoney and Vincent (2018) support that an abductive and retroductive approach can potentially provide much more about a phenomenon than the traditional paths of deduction or induction, as they aim to add theory to data, rather than induction or deduction which do not. A lot of researchers treat both abductive and retroductive approaches as one application, sometimes involving the movement from qualitative data to the theory that best explains the data (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). The present research makes use of both approaches when analysing the collected data. This approach supports the aim of the thesis to ‘understand’ the particular phenomenon, as it helps to uncover specific social structures or conditions that facilitate causal mechanisms take effect in the real world (Fletcher, 2017) and to broaden and expand knowledge around the topic of interest in general (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013).

Applying the three domain principles of critical realism to the particular parameters of the present study, would provide a useful map, in order to understand the principles of the environment in which learning and knowledge management within hotel chain internationalisation occurs. This environment can be extremely complex, as several different relationships can potentially exist between the various different entities, structures and actors. It can potentially become even more complex, when causal powers, that can enable, constrain or block mechanisms of other entities can shift

between agency and structure. An example of this environment can be seen in figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5: Environment



Source: Author

Having analysed the tenets of critical realism, the research approach and design that was followed in the present study is explained in the next chapter.

3.4.2 Qualitative research

It is important to establish the reasoning behind utilising a qualitative approach in the present research, before developing the research design. The research questions and

overall aim should direct the researcher in selecting the appropriate research tools and approach (Flick, 2007), as some will be suited better than others (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The strategy that needs to be followed depends on the nature of the issues that requires investigation (Zalan & Lewis, 2004). Both quantitative and qualitative research cover several different methods within each one of them. A quantitative approach is generally based on the premise of building hypotheses, guided by theory, and then testing them (Bell et al., 2018; Wilmot, 2005). A qualitative approach however is based on the premise of understanding the world as seen through the lenses of the individuals investigated (Wilmot, 2005). Rather than using hypotheses as a starting point, qualitative research allows for theory and meaning in general to surface while exploring the data (Wilmot, 2005). Using the objectives and research question of the present thesis to identify the approach best suited, it can be established that an approach that will help explain is better suited. This research aims to investigate a process and build an understanding, based on the actor's perspectives. As qualitative research seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of a particular issue, through the careful examination of data as provided by the participants, including their knowledge as well as their motivations (Ritchie et al., 2013), it would be better strategy for exploring the particular phenomenon. Rich descriptions, words and meanings can be of particular help in this matter, something that quantitative research would be less concerned with (Wilson, 2014), as it focuses on measuring and numbers (Bell et al., 2018). Qualitative research therefore has an interpretive approach, as the researcher assesses social phenomena holistically, identifies themes and interprets the data, providing insights and conclusions (Creswell, 2003). As seen in the literature review carried out, the learning and knowledge management within hotel chains, during their internationalisation activities, are processes deep-seated in context. This presents a unique and complex phenomenon, that is constructed by the actors or entities within the 'real' domain of the environment under investigation. Adapting a qualitative research strategy for the present thesis, will support the capturing of a 'snapshot' of reality (Saunders et al., 2009), as this is seen through their eyes, in order to understand and cover the research aim and question (Ritchie et al., 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The exploration and explanation of the particular organisational processes therefore, that are deep-seated in context, would benefit from a qualitative strategy (Pettigrew, 1992).

It is also important to highlight that a qualitative approach would ensure that the views of the individual, and their perceptions, are taken into consideration in order to construct an understanding of the particular phenomenon (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Patton, 1999; Saunders et al., 2009), as the literature reviews has suggested that the role of the individual within this process is of importance.

3.4.3 Research design

Despite the eclecticism and flexibility that critical realism allows, there seem to be some common approaches to research design, used by researchers within the particular paradigm (Karlsson & Ackroyd, 2014). In order to avoid giving wrong causal attributes and uncovering as many as possible underlying mechanisms that are at play, Sayer (1992) suggests that abstraction is the first step, followed by interpretation within the particular context. Based on this, he dichotomised research methods into two designs: extensive and intensive. He explained that while extensive research designs seem to be the norm in social studies and involve identifying a population sample and seeking quantitatively measured variable relationships, they do not directly examine the causal groups in which specific individuals or units are involved, such as networks of particular people, business units, or discourses, etc. with which they interact. On the other hand, an intensive approach would start by considering the individuals or other units involved, explore the causal relationships into which they are involved, and examine their nature as well as their number. The differences between intensive and extensive research designs can be seen in table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Intensive and extensive research

	Intensive	Extensive
Research Question	How does a process work in a particular case or small number of cases? What produces a certain change? What did the agents actually do?	What are the regularities, common patterns, distinguishing features of a population? How widely are certain characteristics or

		processes distributed of represented?
Relations	Substantial relations of connection.	Formal relations of similarity.
Type of groups studied	Causal groups.	Taxonomic groups.
Type of account produced	Causal explanation of the production of certain objects or events, though not necessarily representative ones.	Descriptive 'representative' generalisations, lacking in explanatory penetration.
Typical methods	Study of individual agents in their causal contexts, interactive interviews, ethnography, qualitative analysis.	Large-scale survey of population or representative sample, formal questionnaires, standardized interviews. Statistical analysis.
Limitations	Actual concrete patterns and contingent relations are unlikely to be 'representative', 'average' or generalizable. Necessary relations discovered will exist wherever their relata are present, for example causal powers of objects are generalizable to other contexts as they are necessary features of these objects.	Although representative of a whole population, they are unlikely to be generalisable to other populations at different times and places. Problem of ecological fallacy in making inferences about individuals. Limited explanatory power.
Appropriate tests	Corroboration	Replication

Source: Sayer (2000)

The thesis will benefit from an intensive approach, examining the causal mechanisms involved in producing potential outcomes, such as the way actors interact, or how

networks function and ways of capturing tacit and implicit knowledge during international expansion. Exploring therefore the individuals involved, their interactions and other causal relationships they are involved in, will provide a deeper understanding of the real and the potential outcomes.

Building on Sayer’s two approaches and taking into consideration the need for either abductive or retroductive logic, Karlsson and Ackroyd (2014), devised a table with eight research designs within realist informed research (table 3.4). The aim was to present a range of different designs, that are logically possible and most often used within critical realist research. The intensive or extensive research design provides a range of possibilities, which can be viewed from the depth of involvement (detached and engaged studies). These also depend upon the context and mechanism, which in turn depend on the research questions, aim and objectives of the study. The dominant logic of discovery shows the relationship between mechanism and context and determines how much a research design relies on abductive or retroductive logic.

Table 3.4: Designs relevant to realist-informed research

Distinctive Research Strategies				
Intensive \leftrightarrow Extensive				
How do context and mechanism:				
	What is the mechanism? (Context as given)	Typically interact?	Historically intersect?	What is the context (Mechanisms inferred)
Research Procedures				
Detached Study	Case studies	Comparative case analysis	Generative institutional analysis	Research surveys and census data
Engaged Study	Action research	Intensive realist evaluation	Barefoot historical research	Extensive realist evaluation
Dominant logic of discovery:	Abduction	Abduction	Abduction/ Retroduction	Abduction/ Retroduction

Source: Karlsson and Ackroyd (2014)

Abductive and retroductive logic is central to critical realism and help the researcher to ‘go beyond’ the standard inductive or abductive analysis of data (Ackroyd, 2009). This means that using abduction and retroduction, the research can benefit from identifying

emergent structures within the data, reflecting the ‘actual’ and the ‘real’ as per the critical realist ontology. This is particularly beneficial for case study research, which seeks to study a phenomenon in depth.

Case study research, which is being utilised in the present thesis, seems to have a dominant role within critical realist research, as it follows abductive logic, which might allow causal mechanisms to be isolated and studied (Easton, 2010; Karlsson & Ackroyd, 2014). Several studies have employed case study research in order to uncover organisational mechanisms and structures that are at play (Farquhar, 2012; Karlsson & Ackroyd, 2014), with the ones contacted by Selznick (1953) and Blau (1963) being the starting foundational point for organisational research using case studies.

Case studies can be extremely useful in providing an insight into a phenomenon within the subject of international business (Ghuri, 2004). They do however present certain advantages and disadvantages, depending on their design and number of cases involved (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2017; Farquhar, 2012; Yin, 2003). As mentioned earlier, there are three main types of case study research design: the single case, the multiple case and the embedded research design (Farquhar, 2012). The advantages and disadvantages of these three types can be seen in table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5: Case study design type advantages and disadvantages

Case study design type	Advantage	Disadvantage
Single case study	Depth, insight, revelatory, uniqueness	Evolving boundaries of case and credibility issues
Multiple case study	‘Robustness’ of study due to the ‘stronger’ evidence and a case for additional validity of the research.	Less depth and sometimes requires additional resources
Embedded case study	Better accuracy	Requires more recourses as well as increased commitment

Source: Farquhar (2012)

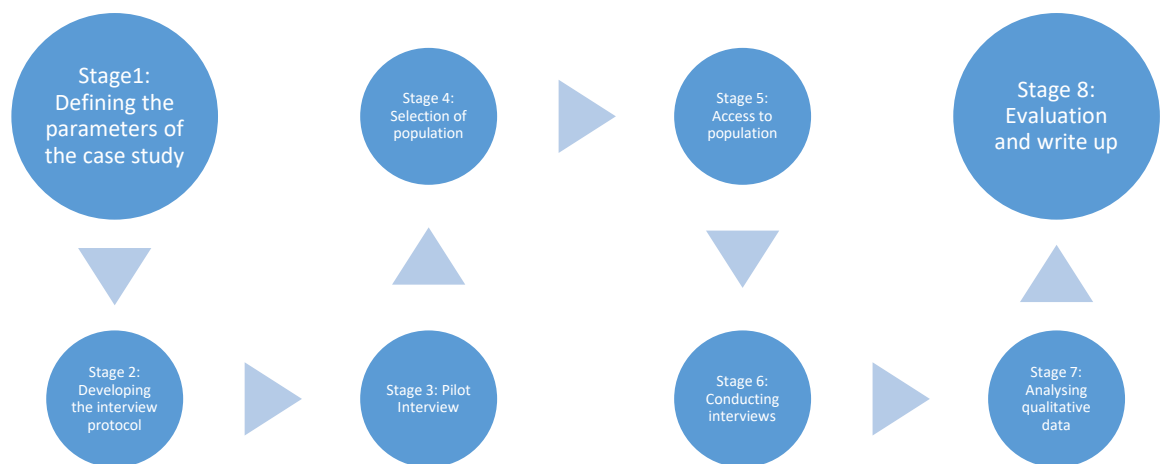
Given the same context in all of the three above designs, the researcher can choose to employ any of the three, depending on what he or she is seeking to achieve. A single case study involves one organisation only, as unit of analysis (Yin, 2009). The embedded

case study involves more than one unit of analysis, but within the same organisation. This allows more depth to the study (Farquhar, 2012). Finally, the multiple case study involves more than one organisation as units of analysis, seeking to compare and contrast cases or examine a phenomenon from all these different organisational perspectives (Farquhar, 2012; Voss et al., 2002).

3.5 Research procedure

The research procedure involves eight stages, as seen in figure 3.6 below, starting with establishing the parameters for the case study.

Figure 3.6: Research procedure



Source: Author

3.5.1 Stage 1 – Defining the parameters of the case study

What is the case

A case, from a research perspective, can be defined as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles et al., 2018, p. 28) or as “a single instance or example of a problem, issue, or hypothesis” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 14). Defining what the case is, is one of the most important steps within case study research (Tellis,

1997), as it ensures that the study is coherent, consistent and the research feasible from both a resources and time perspective (Fabregues & Fetters, 2019). Although, the case can be seen as the unit of analysis (Patton, 2002; Miles et al., 2018), as it is the unit of analysis that defines the case (Tellis, 1997), it has been argued that these are two different concepts and should not be used interchangeably (Grunbaum, 2007). This however depends on the case study design and its rationale, as the researcher can choose to study more than one cases, from a holistic perspective, where the case and unit of analysis is indistinguishable, or more than one case, following an non-holistic or embedded unit of analysis approach, where the case and unit of analysis is distinguishable (Yin, 2003). According to Tellis (1997), the unit of analysis is typically ‘a system of action’ rather than an individual or group of individuals. For the purposes of the present study, the unit of analysis is defined as the international hotel-chain organisation. The definition of international hotel chains that has been adopted for the present research has been analysed within the literature review. A hotel chain is “a group of hotels, or any accommodation establishments, sharing a common brand and similar concept, implementing at least one centralised function, in order to reach a better market position and improve the performance of all properties. The hotel chains utilise equity and/or non-equity modes for their growth and operate on local, regional, national and/ international level” (Ivanova & Rahimi, 2016, p. 16). The case is “the learning and management of knowledge of international hotel chains, during the process of international expansion”. The context and further parameters of the case study are analysed in stage 4 of the research procedure – selection of population and sample.

Case study approach

The thesis employs a multiple case study or collective design, in order to develop a rounded understanding around the phenomenon at hand (Farquhar, 2012; Mills et al., 2010), rather than make generalisations (Ghauri, 2004). The design of multiple case study is relevant to realist-informed research (Karlsson & Ackroyd, 2014) and provides a case for additional validity, due to the stronger evidence collected (Farquhar, 2012). Case studies allow the empirical exploration of a phenomenon, within a real life setting and are of particular help when the borderlines between the phenomenon and the real-

life setting are not clearly visible (Yin, 2003). According to Easton (2010), case study research fits well within a critical realist framework. A collective or multiple case study design has been employed for the present thesis, to allow for the particular phenomenon to be examined within the same context, from multiple different angles (Easton, 2010; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Farquhar, 2012). As seen above in Organogram 1, although hotel chains tend to have very hierarchical structures, they might break the internationalisation roles down to several different positions, using various different names to describe their function. As will be seen later on, in stage 4, the directors of international development of hotel chains, are ultimately the main actors, managing internationalisation from their unique position, which in some cases allows them the opportunity to make decisive decisions on the feasibility and process of international projects. The particular role however might be come under various different titles, depending on the different hotel chain hierarchical structure. A multiple case study design, will therefore allow for data to be collected from different units of study, and in this particular case cases, (performing the same functions, but with different hierarchical structures) based within the same context (Farquhar, 2012; Mills et al., 2010). This will enable the study to look into the similarities and differences between the cases and draw comparisons. The findings of multiple case study research are considered robust and reliable (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and can provide a wider perspective on the particular phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2003).

For exploratory and inductive research, interviews are ideal as they concentrate on developing an understanding of social actions, through the interpretation of the meanings of individuals and groups in a specific context (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). According to Flick et al. (2009), Interviews can be semi-structured or open style discussions. The most important element that characterises both is that they can provide in depth understandings (Rapley, 2001), of processes that are difficult to be observed, as they record the participant experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). One of the aims of the present study is to explore the research topic from the perspective of the participants, or the main actors, and understand how and why they support the specific view (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

3.5.2 Stage 2 – Developing the interview protocol

Interviews can be structured in several different ways. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) separated these approaches, based on location, formality, kind of participant utilised and purpose of conversation, into five distinguished categories. There are: ethnographic, informant, respondent, narrative and focus group interviews. Other authors have developed other categories as well, looking at interviews by the number of participants involved (individual or group), the way the questions are administered (face to face, mailed or self-administered questionnaires and telephone surveys), or their structure (structured, semi structured or unstructured) (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Lee & Aslam, 2018). The present thesis utilises a 'respondent' interview format with an element of 'narration' in them, which was ensured by the 'semi structured' nature of them. The questions were open-ended, to allow the interviewees 'tell their story', without any leading comments by the researcher (Lee & Aslam, 2018). Cassell (2015) explains that semi-structured interviews offer many different options to the researcher, depending on what the interviews seek to uncover. The same author further explains that there are two types of semi-structured interviews of a thematic structure: exploratory and theoretical. While an exploratory interview would seek to gather data on a specific topic from several different angles, the theoretical interview allows the generation of data that enable theory development. The choice to utilise a theoretical semi-structured interview approach, with an element of 'narration', was made in order to collect data, as it would allow to systematically organise the themes identified within the literature review, and explore the different theoretical aspects of the topic, while allowing for new information to emerge.

The questions for the present study were therefore developed based on the aims and objectives of the research, ensuring that they, as well as the research question, are fully covered (See appendix 5). This was something that was discussed in the chapter on reflexivity, in terms of how there needs to be a generic structure, based on theory, in order to trigger relevant responses, as otherwise it would have been impossible to generate any meaningful data (Ryan et al., 2012). Once the questions were developed,

they were ordered in a thematic structure (Cassell, 2015). The order started with some generic introductory questions, which would help to ‘break the ice’ and place the interviewee at ease, while generating relevant context information (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012). This type of questions is also helpful in finding out more about the background of the interviewee as well as the organisation they represent (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). The questions based on the different themes would be asked in the middle of the interview, following a logical sequence, helping therefore the interviewees understand the parameters in which they can develop their narrative. The interviewees would be given the opportunity to answer the questions uninterrupted, following the principle of ‘conversational collaboration’, in which the researcher provides the setting, and the interviewees complete their full narrative (Archer, 2003). This reasoning will then allow for different themes to develop, while hidden structures might start to appear. The end of the interview would include questions that might help clarify possible themes that emerged during its course (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012; Ryan et al., 2012).

Several different issues relating to the population had to be taken into consideration before developing the interview protocol. These varied from the language used during the interviews to the time at the disposal of the interviewees. In table 3.6, the issues and their solutions can be seen.

Table 3.6: Potential interview issues and possible solutions

Potential issue	Solution
The interviewees will not necessarily be aware of internationalisation theories, models and academic terms	The language used must be neutral or easy to understand. The questions must be structured in plain language, covering the theoretical aspects in a way that a practitioner can answer (Cassell, 2015; Lee & Aslam, 2018).
The interviewees might not understand the topic or purpose of the interview	The aim and purpose of the research and interview will be explained in a ‘participant information sheet’, which will explain the title, purpose, aims and objectives of the research, how the data collected will be used and how-to outcomes will be handled. The standard SHU ‘participant information sheet’ is to be used, together with an email

	<p>explaining what the study is about and who the researcher is (Orb et al., 2001).</p> <p>All this information will be briefly covered again, at the beginning of each interview, as the participants might have forgotten, or have not had the time to read the documentation that was sent to them.</p>
<p>The interviewees might not be answering the questions as expected or be off topic</p>	<p>The interviewees will be allowed to speak freely and uninterrupted, in order to allow for an element of narration (Archer, 2003; Lee & Aslam, 2018). In extreme situations however, some flexibility might be needed (Roulston et al., 2003). The author might use his judgement and provide some clarification, or ask the same question again, using different wording, should the circumstances require him to do so (for example if running out of time, or the answers are completely irrelevant). An effort will be made however for the interviewees to answer freely.</p>
<p>The interviewees might not have time for long interviews</p>	<p>A request for one hour will be initially made and if not possible, the interview will have to be managed in less time, but not less than 45 minutes. This might mean managing the questions in a way that will allow completing the interview faster, for example allowing less time for the icebreaker questions, or moving on if the interviewees will seem to have completed their answer (May, 1991).</p>
<p>They might not feel comfortable discussing internal processes</p>	<p>An effort will be made to ensure that the interviewees understand the confidential nature of the interview and how the data obtained will be used and also be disposed of at the end (Dempsey, et al., 2016; Morse, 1998). This will be done through the initial email that will be send to them, together with the 'participant information sheet', the consent form that they will need to sign and return, and a statement that is to be read out at the beginning of the interview.</p> <p>To avoid placing the interviewees under stress, the questions will be formulated in a way that will allow them to discuss processes and business policies and concepts in a generic way (Roberts, 2020; Welch et al., 2002).</p>

	The confidential nature of the interviews will be highlighted again at the completion of the interview and also in a follow up thank you email (Orb, et al., 2001).
The interviewees might not provide the required level of 'depth' in the information they provide	Similarly, to the issue of understanding the topic, it will be important to explain the aim and purpose of the research and interview (in the 'participant information sheet'. The questions will be formulated in a way, that will allow the in-depth exploration of certain topics (Kaliber, 2019).

Source: Author

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations should be part of any research project (Orb et al., 2000). These considerations range from obtaining informed consent for the research by the participants, to their confidentiality and privacy (Shaw, 2003). As per the SHU ethical rules and regulations, the interviewees were contacted in advance via email, to assess their willingness to participate in the study, having firstly understood the purpose, aims and their own personal involvement. An information sheet, a consent form, as well as the questions were all emailed in advance and the interviews went ahead, once all these were confirmed (please see Appendix for the forms).

University equipment was used exclusively to conduct these interviews. The location of the interviewer was a private room at SHU (SBS, City Campus), specifically booked for this purpose. Therefore, there was no travelling involved, or face to face contact with the interviewees.

All data collected, has been stored and processed on the interviewers' SHU computer and research safe folder, provided by the university for this purpose and will be deleted from the recorders. There will be no reference to the individuals involved or the particular organisations when analysing and presenting the data. These will then be deleted after the completion of the degree of the researcher.

Two ethical forms were submitted (SHUREC 1 and SHUREC 2a) were submitted by the researcher in order to seek permission to carry out the research. Confirmation of permission was obtained via the researchers' Director of Studies.

3.5.3 Stage 3 – Pilot interview

The pilot interview was conducted at an early stage, as soon as the questions were prepared, in order for the researcher to familiarise himself with the equipment used (Cisco telephone set, iPod and iPhone for the recordings), test the interview questions, and understand the overall process of interviewing with the chosen specifications, booking an appointment, organising the equipment and the interviewing space, conducting the interview, transcribing it and appreciating the timing requirements for all tasks. One other major factor for carrying out the interview, was to assess the suitability of the population. The pilot interview was conducted with the European head of development of an international hotel chain. The interview took one hour. All questions seemed to be easy to understand from the participant's side, but in some instances the answers went off-topic. While the pilot interview confirmed the suitability of the particular set up, set of questions, population and interview approach, a major topic that emerged based on the answers given, was the importance of the role of networks for transferring knowledge within the internationalisation process. The thematic analysis of the interview showed that the role of networks is a theme of importance within the current topic and their nature dynamic and complex. This is something that the literature review has shown to have a significant role within the internationalisation process (Ford, 1980; Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Idris & Saridakis, 2018; Johanson & Mattsson, 1988; Whitelock, 2002). The decision to add the role of networks for transferring knowledge within a hotel internationalisation context, as a research objective, was made after the completion of the analysis of the pilot interview. Another interesting theme that emerged from analysing the first interview, was the role of the individual within the different hierarchical layers of the hotel chain (Casillas et al., 2015; Lindsay et al., 2003). The participant highlighted several times, her initiatives in sharing, transferring, storing and re-using knowledge gained during expansion projects, in a manner that indicated that there were not standardised processes in place, but it all

depended on managerial intervention and initiative (Lindsay et al., 2003). These two points that emerged during the course of the analysis, sensitised the researcher on these two themes of interest and notes were made as part of reflecting on the data. An additional question on using external networks as a source of knowledge was added (see table 3.7) below. The rest interview questions were kept the same for the rest of the interviews, but focal points (comments) were added below each question, as reminders to the researcher as to what topic the question is covering. This ensured a consistent approach, that allowed for the participants from one hand to freely ‘tell their story’, and on the other to allow other themes of interest to potentially emerge and any changes to the actual questions might have hindered that (Ryan et al., 2012). If they did however, in the course of the discussion, bring these up, more probing questions seeking clarification would ensue.

Table 3.7: Additional question on networks and relationships as a source of knowledge

QUESTION	OBJECTIVE	LITERATURE
<p>7. Would you consider reaching out to other colleagues in the industry for information on international expansion projects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of knowledge do you seek when communicating with colleagues in the industry? • Do you have an established network or working relationships with other professionals in the industry, including other competitor hotel chains, that you utilise as sources of knowledge and the opposite? 	<p>3</p>	<p>Role of networks as knowledge sources Chandler & Lyon (2009); Chetty & Campbell-Hunt (2004); Dau (2015); Eriksson et al. (1997); Fletcher & Ford (1980); Hadley & Wilson (2003); Harris (2012); Huber (1991); Idris & Saridakis (2018); Johanson & Mattsson (1988)</p> <p>Relationships in internationalisation Freeman et al. (2010); Harris & Wheeler (2005); Lindsay et al. (2003); Pinho & Prange (2016).</p>

Source: Author

3.5.4 Stage 4 – Selection of population and sample

Population

One of the most important steps of a case study research design is the identification of the unit of analysis and the bounds of the case (Farquhar, 2012). With several hotel chains operating internationally and for the scope of the present study, the research was confined within a specific geographical area that would allow for a more defined

and focused approach. The European continent was selected as the area of focus, due to the large number of countries that it includes, the diversity of its' markets and also the large number of hotel chains operating within it. Europe has been a significant player in the development of international hotel chains. According to Slattery et al. (2008), this has mainly been due to the structural development of many European economies that led to a booming in the demand for hotel properties. They explain that there are seven major international hotel chains that have presence in the Americas, Europe and Asia, which account for more than half of the international hotel chain presence in Europe. These chains are: Accor, Carlson Hospitality, Choice Hotels International, HHC, IHG, Marriott and Starwood Hotels and Resorts (now part of Marriott). The number of international hotel chain brands operating in Europe, reached 7,539 in 2019, with a provision of 986,620 rooms, in the same year (Horwath HTL 2019 – compiled using data from 22 European countries).

Population refers to the entire pool of entities that the research relates to (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). For the purposes of the particular thesis, the population has been identified, as the teams within hotel chains leading international expansion efforts, and specifically the people that are responsible for the decision making when internationalising. As previously explained, international hotel chains are very hierarchical as organisations and not all chains have the same roles. An examination of three large international hotel chain profiles, through their dedicated development sites, reveal that although their development team structure is similar, the titles somewhat differ, depending to either the geographical area of responsibility or the number of hierarchical layers, affecting the overall responsibilities (see analysis below). For the purposes of this illustration, the region of Europe was chosen to be examined, due to the high number of different markets involved.

As seen above, although some hotel chains that operate on the European continent, tend to identify the area of their responsibility exclusively within Europe, while others tend to also add Middle East and Africa (known as EMEA: Europe, Middle East, Africa) and sometimes even Russia. The population for this research is all international hotel chains with operations within the geographical location of Europe, irrespective of the

additional geographical coverage. The other usual development offices cover the regions of Asia-Pacific and the Americas, or AMER (North, Central and South America).

Hilton Hotels Regional Development Team (EUROPE)

Senior Vice President Development EMEA

Vice President – North and West Europe

Vice President Development, Central, Eastern & Southern Europe

Vice President Development – Luxury, Europe and Africa

Vice President Development – EMEA, Hampton by Hilton Garden Inn & Motto by Hilton

VP Development Renewals & Retentions EMEA

Director Development Renewals, Retentions & Support EMEA

Senior Development Manager, EMEA

Development Manager, Luxury – Europe & Africa

Development Manager, EMEA

MARRIOTT Hotels Development Team (EUROPE)

Chief Development Officer Europe

Regional Vice President Europe

Vice President Europe

Director (Germany, Austria & Switzerland)

Senior Director Pan-European

Manager Pan-European

LONDON OFFICE

Regional VP Western Europe

Senior Director UK & Ireland

PARIS OFFICE

VP France & Benelux

Director France & Benelux

Director France & Benelux

BARCELONA OFFICE

Director Spain & Portugal

MILAN OFFICE

Senior Director Italy

Director Italy

ISTANBUL OFFICE

Director Turkey

ZAGREB OFFICE

Regional VP Eastern Europe, Russia & the CIS

Director South Easter Europe

MOSCOW OFFICE

Director Russia & the CIS

ATHENS OFFICE

Director Greece

WARSAW OFFICE

Senior Director Central & Eastern Europe

EDITION AND W DEVELOPMENT

Senior VP Global

VP Global

VP Global

MIXED USE AND REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

Global Real Estate Office Global

Senior VP, Mixed Use Development Global

ACCOR HOTELS GROUP Development Team EUROPE

SVP Head of Development Europe

VP Development Central Europe (Austria Germany & Switzerland)

VP Development North Europe (Benelux, Ireland, Nordic Countries & UK)

VP Development South Europe (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal & Spain)

VP Development France

VP Development New East (Israel, Russia & CIS and Turkey)

VP Development East Europe
Adagio International Development East Europe

Analysing the above three hotel chain hierarchical structures, it is interesting to note that they are all different. Hilton Hotels seem to include development managers in the structure, while the others do not, at least in what is presented on their websites. The geographical areas of responsibility seem to differ, despite some common themes. Marriott Hotels seem to break the hierarchy down to much smaller regional areas but does not present any roles below those of director. The common role themes in all three are:

Chief or Development/ Senior Vice President (EMEA or EUROPE)

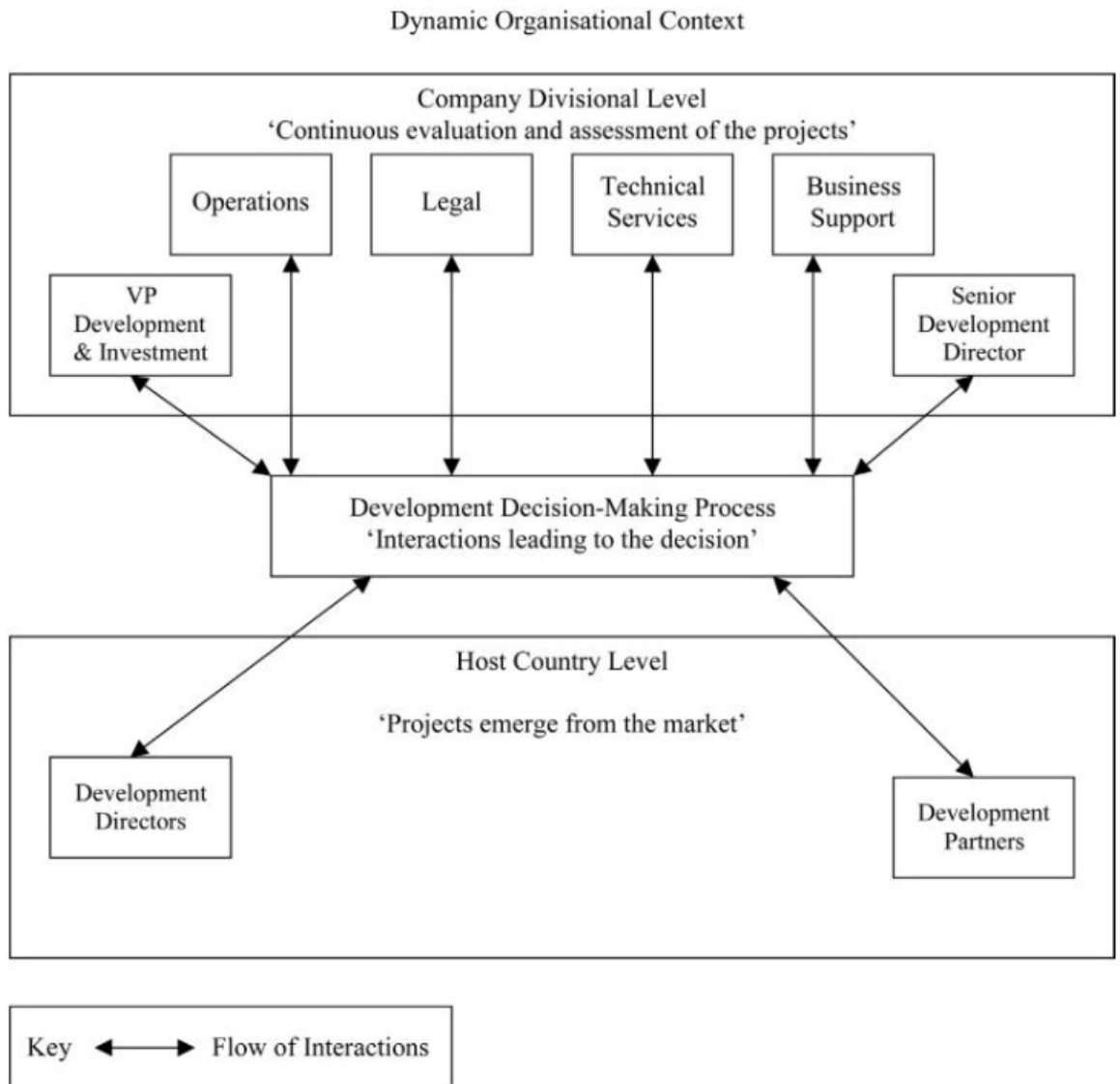
VP (Regional or by brand)

Director (Regional or by brand)

Manager (Regional or by brand)

According to literature, the profile and motivation of the management of hotels, responsible for internationalising decisions, play a crucial role (De Correia et al., 2019). There are several different decision makers within the internationalisation process of hotel chains. They can be distinguished into those on a company divisional level and those on the host country level (Altinay & Roper, 2001). On a company divisional level, the decision makers would be the VP of development as well as the departments of investment, operations, legal, technical services, business support and the senior development director. On a host country level, the decision makers would be the development directors and the development partners (see figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: The decision makers within the internationalisation process of hotel chains



Source: Roper & Altinay (2001, p341)

The hotel chain development directors seem to complete a key function within the process, as they develop and implement the expansion strategy within a particular geographic area, while playing a strategic mediating role between the two sides (Altinay & Roper, 2001). This is due to their local knowledge, responsiveness and networks, as well as due to their entrepreneurial skills and awareness of cultural differences, that helps them to contribute both as 'salesmen' and as 'educators'. Altinay (2005), refers to the development directors of international hotel chains using the term 'intrapreneurs', placing an emphasis on the fact that they are working more within the boundaries of their organisation, and are considered moderate risk takers, even though they have the same characteristics with entrepreneurs, being able to take and implement strategic

decisions. According to Yeung (2002), their role is key to the organisational viability. The importance of their role as intrapreneurs within the internationalisation efforts of a hotel chain, is due to their wide understanding of both internal and external environments of the organisations, and their central role in the middle of affairs, acting “as central focuses for multidirectional interfaces with internal and external stakeholders, such as clients and suppliers” (Geisler 1993, p. 55). Their role is very similar to that of middle management, as they handle and communicate ambiguous, diverse and complex data to the senior levels of the hierarchy, that relate to strategic circumstances, in order to affect and shape their strategic thinking (Altinay, 2004; Geisler, 1993). According to Welch et al. (2002, p. 613), someone that “occupies a senior or middle management position; has functional responsibility in an area which enjoys high status in accordance with corporate values; has considerable industry experience and frequently also long tenure with the company; possesses a broad network of personal relationships; and has considerable international exposure” can be defined as an elite interviewee. The main benefit of researching elites is that they can provide rich and relevant data, as they are the ones behind the decision making mechanisms of an organisation (Mikecz, 2012).

Sample

Research sampling starts with the selection of people to interview, as well as decisions about settings, events and social processes (Miles et al., 2014). When it comes to sampling, the question on whether to use probability and non-probability sampling comes into play (Miles et al., 2014; Symon & Cassell, 2018). The choice has to enable for the appropriate data to be collected, in order to assess the research question, aims and objectives (Guest et al., 2006). It is therefore important to examine the differences between the two sampling approaches and understand their advantages and disadvantages. One of the main differences between the two approaches is that probability sampling is of an explanatory nature when addressing the research aim, while non-probability sampling of an exploratory one, utilising rich understandings (Symon & Cassell, 2013). Probability sampling requires that the research participants are selected in a random manner, which ensures objectivity in terms of the researcher’s choices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The statistical representation it offers, forms the

basis for generalising the findings based on that sample, which is considered relatively large (Symon & Cassell, 2013). Non-probability sampling on the other hand, does not necessarily require a specified population and the sample choice and selection is based upon the researcher’s judgement (Wilmot, 2005). The findings may be transferable if the research is undertaken theoretically, and the sample size can be relatively small (Symon & Cassell, 2013). As the present study follows a qualitative design and an exploratory case study approach, aiming to establish an understanding of a real-life phenomenon rather than making statistical inferences and measuring, non-probability sampling would be more appropriate (Symon & Cassell, 2013; Wilmot, 2005). Yin (2003) suggests that non-probability sampling is particularly appropriate for case study research, as this type of research tends to focus on smaller samples. Having established the appropriateness of non-probability sampling for the present study, it is important to also explain which sampling technique would be the best, taking into consideration the population and also scope of the research.

Non-probability sampling can be further distinguished into four main techniques. These are: quota sampling, snowball sampling, convenience sampling and purposive or judgmental sampling (Taherdoost, 2016). All non-probability sampling techniques have different advantages and disadvantages and can be seen in table 3.8 below.

Table 3.8: Non-probability sampling techniques, strengths and weaknesses

Technique	Strengths	Weaknesses
Quota sampling	Sample is chosen based on specific participant characteristics that aim to provide a correlation with the wider population, as the total sample will have the same distribution of characteristics (Davies, 2005)	There is an obvious selection bias inherent to the method (Malhotra & Birks, 2006)
Snowball sampling	Supports access to participants when access is an issue and therefore helps increase the sample size (Taherdoost, 2016) Can estimate rare characteristics (Malhotra &	It can be time demanding (Malhotra & Birks, 2006)

	Birks 2006) Often leads to a homogenous sample (Lee, 1993)	
Convenience sampling	Allows to access the participants that are the easiest to approach. It is inexpensive and easy compared to others sampling techniques and it is the least time demanding method (Taherdoost, 2016)	The sample cannot be representative. There is an obvious selection bias inherent to the method and it is not recommended by descriptive or casual research (Malhotra & Birks, 2006)
Judgment sampling	Also known as purposive sampling, allows to deliberately target specific individuals the researcher feels require inclusion, so that the sample provides a form of representation (Maxwell 1996; Vehovar, Toepoel & Steinmetz) The costs involved are generally low. It is not as time demanding as other methods and it is ideal for an exploratory research design (Taherdoost, 2016)	The subjective nature of it is only appropriate for the selection of smaller samples (Battaglia, 2008) It provides subjective outcomes and does not provide grounds for generalising (Malhotra & Birks, 2006) Different experts might come up with different sampled elements from the population of interest (Battaglia 2008)

Source: Compiled by the author

Having analysed the four main non-probability sampling techniques, a choice should be made by taking into consideration the research question and objectives. As explained in 'stage 1' of the research procedure, the population involves individuals working within the department of 'international development' of hotel chains. Taking into consideration the exploratory nature of the present research and the aim to understand the particular phenomenon, as well as the specialised nature of the role of the population, the decision was made to use judgment or purposive sampling. As seen above, it allows flexibility in choosing the sample and focuses on the characteristics of the participants (Guest et al., 2006; Wilmot, 2005). Battaglia, et al. (2008, p. 2) following this approach, explains that "the main objective of a purposive sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population". Again,

this can be further supported with the application of an expert understanding of the population (Battaglia et al., 2008; Wilmot, 2005), in order to pick a sample in a non-random way, that can reflect the population in a generic way, as the population may not be well defined (Battaglia et al., 2008; Etikan et al., 2016). It is however extremely important that the selection of the sample is done with care and sound judgement, as improperly collected data would hinder or invalidate the research (Etikan et al., 2016). The author has decided to apply his own personal practitioner experience and expertise in the hotel sector and make a selection of the most appropriate positions within the international development departments of hotel chains, that will be able to provide well informed answers and data, that will cover the research question, aims and objectives (Voss et al., 2002; Yin, 1994).

When it comes to the size of the sample, the quantity of participants in a study involving a judgmental non-random approach, is not as critical as the criteria that the researcher uses to identify them (Etikan et al., 2016; Wilmot, 2005). There are no requirements for underpinning the sample with theories or an exact number of individuals participating to validate it (Etikan et al., 2016). The number of participants required depends on when data saturation or data adequacy is achieved (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse, 1995; Zhi, 2014). This means that a researcher should continue interviewing, until nothing new emerges from the data (Etikan et al., 2016), or the information that comes through is of little significance (Guest et al., 2006). Although, there have been no publications on set guidelines for the sample required to reach saturation (Morse, 1995), theoretical saturation remains good practice for qualitative research (Guest et al., 2006). The subject of participants needed to reach saturation has been debated within academia, with the numbers needed ranging from 5 participants as minimum (Creswell, 1998) to 200 as maximum (Morse, 1994). The recommendations made depend on the epistemological approach followed (please see table 3.9 for a comparison between the different suggestions).

Table 3.9: A comparison between the number of participants needed for different types of qualitative research

Author	Research type	Number of interviews needed
Bertaux (1981)	All qualitative work	15
Kuzel (1992)	For homogenous samples	6-8
	For maximizing variation	12-20
Morse (1994)	Phenomenological studies	6 (minimum)
	Ethnographies, Grounded theory, ethnoscience	36
	Qualitative ethology	200
Creswell (1998)	Phenomenological studies	5-25
	Grounded theory studies	20-30
Bernard (2000)	Ethnographic	36
Guest, Bunce & Johnson (2006)	All qualitative work	6-12

Source: Compiled by author using Guest et al. (2006)

It is acknowledged that the selection of the particular technique for drawing a sample has some limitations. The fact that the research is utilising a non-random set of participants, based on the author's opinion, is biased and subjective (Etikan et al., 2016). This impedes the research findings from being able to be generalised to the wider population (Battaglia et al., 2008; Malhotra & Birks, 2006). Another limitation comes from determining the number of participants, prior to the study taking place (Cheek, 2000). The number of the participants cannot be known with precision in advance and can be correctly identified once theoretical saturation is reached (Guest et al., 2006). According to Miles et al. (2014), samples can evolve during the course of the research, as they tend to be not to be wholly prespecified. It is essential however to set parameters, defining the aspects of the sample that is due to be studied. Eisenhardt (1989) supports that 4 to 10 cases could provide enough data for a reliable conclusion, while Easton (2010) states that case study research provides clear insights into a phenomenon, regardless of the number of research units involved. It is important however to emphasise here again the importance of theoretical saturation and avoid setting a specific number of participants, as the aim of case study research is to provide an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon (Farquhar, 2012; Yin, 2013).

A list of international hotel chains operating in Europe was build using internet searches. The list comprised of international hotel chains, irrespective of the number of brands under their umbrella, their brand star rating or size. The author has examined the population through the lenses of an experienced practitioner within the international hotel industry, and applying his personal judgement, based on the research question, aims and objective, selected 20 international hotel chains. Although, the aim was not to work with a specific number of participants, the possibility of some declining, not responding or engaging, was taken into consideration. The sample was chosen making an effort to include a variety of organisations, reflecting different sizes, degrees of internationalisation (units abroad), country of origin and number of brands or star/ tier category.

Stage 5 – Access to sample (negotiation)

Flick (2007) suggests that access to sample can be a challenging task for researchers, something that proved to be the case in the present study. Gaining access to elites comes with different challenges such as the time and cost of getting in touch and also gaining consent (Welch et al., 2002). Having selected specific members of the international development team of each hotel chain, an email would be sent directly to them, using their personal work email. In some cases, this was impossible, as their personal work email would not be available online on the hotel chain website. One of the realisations of this activity was that the chosen development team members, would not respond to LinkedIn messages, but would respond to direct emails. Although most emails were available on hotel chain websites, some of them were obtained through the actual interviews themselves, when the interviewees would ask how they can further support the research. It is interesting to note, that when a request for a specific person in a specific chain was made, most of the time the interviewees would have their contacts details readily available and would be happy to share them. In some cases, they would email the particular contact, introducing the researcher and the research to them, which would result in another interview.

During the initial contact, the email would introduce the researcher, the purpose of the research, the time that the interview would take and the option for either a video conference or telephone call to conduct the interview. The email also made it clear that the interviewees and the name of the organisation would be kept anonymous at all times and that the results of the research would be shared with them. Out of the chosen sample, most of the times the development team members would respond positively. One of them not responded at all and one of them felt that someone else from the company should be the one to be interviewed, despite explaining what the research is about.

Having agreed to be interviewed, the researcher would request for a date and time, which the development team members would negotiate. Once the date and time would be finalised, another email would be sent, thanking them for the opportunity, confirming the date and time, and providing them with the actual questions that would be used during the interview as an attachment, a consent form that had to be signed and returned, as well as a general information sheet, providing details on the research. The email would also reiterate that the name of the interviewee and company would be kept private, and it would also explain how the interview would be recorded and what the policy around that is.

In three occasions, the development team members were reached through the researcher's personal industry contacts.

Although most of the times the interviews would be carried out at the agreed date and time, some of them had to be negotiated again, due to the development team members heavy schedules. This resulted in completing the interviews over a period of a year (2018-2019).

3.5.6 Stage 6 – Conducting interviews

Although the selected hotel chain participants were contacted at the same time, the interview appointments took place over the period of a year. All interviews were carried

out as planned, although some had to be rescheduled due to work priorities and commitments of the participants.

All interviews started with an introduction from the researchers' side, aiming to put the participants at ease and explain again the confidentiality arrangements and the subject and aim of the research. Although most of the participants would 'open' in their responses and would engage in a generic way, some of them would ask again about the purpose of the research and the confidentiality clauses, when some of the questions related to internal processes. This shows how protective of the developmental operations, hotel chains are and the emphasis they place on privacy and confidentiality. The introductory part helped build a level of trust and comfort between the researcher and the participant, allowing for the interview to take place in a pleasant, constructive and positive way.

After the introduction, some generic questions on the personal experience of the participants followed. This provided further insights into relevant experiences and knowledge that they might be carrying with them.

It was found that some of the participants would not understand certain terms used in the questions, such as knowledge management or institutional knowledge. It was also found that different words might mean different things for each participant, and not all of them would use the same vocabulary to respond (Treee & Treece, 1986). Therefore, some questions or terms had to be paraphrased so that they are clear and understood (Altricher et al., 2013). Although most of the participants responded within the particular theme for most of the questions, for some of them probing was required to bring them on-topic again. Probing can be used in semi-structured interviews, in order to clarify and ensure reliability of the data (Hutchinson & Skodol-Wilson, 1992). It has to be highlighted however that probing was used in extreme situations, when it was obvious that the participant had not understood the question and an effort was made to allow them to tell 'their story' uninterrupted. From a different perspective, probing can also help 'dig into' certain topics of interest, if these emerge during the course of the interview. Additional off-the-record questions to either clarify or encourage the

participants expand on themes of interest can be valuable (Austin, 1981; Bailey, 1987). Probing questions to help the interviewer stay focused, if necessary, were prepared and added to the questionnaire, below the main questions (see appendix 5).

3.5.7 Stage 7 – Handling and analysing qualitative data

Handling (transcribing and coding)

In qualitative research, the analysis of the data can start as soon as they start being generated (Farquhar, 2012). The transcription therefore took place immediately after each interview was conducted, in an effort to identify similarities or new themes and decide if there had been a data saturation or not. The transcription took place using an audio transcription kit.

The data collected through the interviews were processed following Robson’s five steps for qualitative analysis (2011). The steps involve:

- Transcribe and familiarise (as the transcription was done by the researcher, it helped to familiarise himself with the sets of data).
- Analyse systematically
- Identify themes
- Identify network between themes
- Integrate networks and themes

All interviews were transcribed, using some general rules for transcription, ensuring uniformity between the different sets of data, which would make the analysis easier (please see table 3.10).

Table 3.10: General rules for transcription

• (pause)	Pause in a bracket indicates a short pause, no more than two seconds
• (long pause)	Long pause in a bracket indicates a long pause, more than two seconds
• (laughter)	Participant laughs

•	(coughs)	Participant coughs
•	Erm, err, ehm, etc	According to Jefferson (2004) and Hepburn and Bolden (2013), these interjections or filler words are different between American English speakers, British English speakers and other English speakers. As this is not to be taken into consideration in the analysis, and for the ease of transcription, it was decided to leave them in the text, as they occur naturally in the speech.
•	OK	Abbreviation for Okay
•	XXX	Speech not audible

Source: Jefferson (2004) & Hepburn & Bolden (2013).

Following the transcription, all interviewee personal information as well as organisational names or information that would reveal its identity, were anonymised as per SHU ethic guidelines.

NVivo was used to code all transcribed interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 3) define data coding as “the analytic process through which data are fractured, conceptualised, and integrated to form theory”. It is a useful technique in managing data collected in qualitative research (Gibbs, 2002) and it is helping to sort out the data into concepts and themes (Ghauri, 2004; Voss et al., 2002). The nodes entered stemmed from the research questions, aims and objectives. Further nodes were created as the thematic analysis ensued, as other secondary themes appeared. Although these might not be directly related to this particular study, they were coded in order to support further future examination of the data (please see Appendix 6 for Nodes).

The main themes that were identified are:

1. The impact of experiential knowledge on the hotel chain internationalisation process.
2. Processes that underpin the capturing, storing, re-using and transferring experiential knowledge and knowledge in particular.
3. The impact of networks and personal relationships on knowledge transfer.

Analysing qualitative data

As explained above, each interview was analysed thematically. Both manual and computer-driven analysis was utilised, to benefit from the capabilities of NVivo in ordering, categorising, processing and storing all interview data, and to also to capture the thoughts and ideas of the researcher. All themes and possible sub-themes that might be of interest were labelled (nodes) and a task of compiling them into separate folders ensued (Spiggle, 1994). All interview parts/ quotes under the same theme were compared, and notes were kept developing and constructing understandings (Boeije, 2002). The process of comparing and contrasting the data was constant (Suddaby, 2006), as it was processed into meaningful categories as soon as the data came in, and these were further compared with the conceptual framework and notes were made on the emerging observations. The aim was to first “become intimately familiar” (Voss et al., 2002, p. 213) with each interview/ case and allow it to develop individually, showcasing their unique characteristics and properties. In some cases the themes and sub-themes were further grouped into further smaller categories, or higher order conceptual constructs (Miles & Huberman, 1984), through the process of abstraction (Spiggle, 1994).

An analysis with a deductive reasoning aims to clarify if the collected data are compatible with theories or prior assumptions displayed within the conceptual framework, identified by the researcher (Thomas, 2006). While the intention to analyse the data did have a deductive approach, utilising the lenses and filters established through the literature review and the conceptual framework, in practice an inductive approach was followed too (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Thomas, 2006). Scriven (1991) describes the practice of examining the data with both a deductive and an inductive approach consistent with the critical realist principles. In the present research, the inductive approach analysis refers to the theoretical insights that emerged during the exploration of the data (Farquhar, 2012). The process therefore involved a continuous moving back and forth from theory to data (Thomas, 2006), and from data to theory (Scriven, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Before completing the second step within the analysis of the interviews, several comparisons between the different sets of data, in an effort to identify similarities, to

establish patterns and refine the assigned categories and subcategories (Tesch, 1990). The step of comparisons within the process of the analysis, not only supports the above, but also strengthens the validity of the findings (Boeije, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Comparisons took place within the individual interviews, between all interviews, between interviews that different positions gave (Development Manager, Director of development, Head of International development), comparisons in pairs at the level of the couple and finally through comparing different couples (Boeije, 2002).

Having reached a satisfactory stage within the first part of the analysis of the data, the next step was to seek to establish similarities between the different cases and note the differences. This further led to the uncovering of cause-and-effect relationships within and across the different cases. The identification of cross-case patterns is an important stage within case study research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This involved large visual displays, with arrows and links between the similar themes and subthemes, allowing the researcher to see the 'larger picture'. Approaching the data with an abductive and retroductive logic, is an integral part of critical realist research (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2011). The results of the study were further explored using abductive logic, by comparing and combining the answers of the interviewees, while recognising the influences of other entities that seem to play a role, in order to understand a cause-and-effect process (Ackroyd, 2009). The data revealed certain events, which were assessed by trying to identify the conditions under which these processes or cause and effect relationships occur (Ackroyd, 2009; Fletcher, 2017). The researcher interrogated the data by asking the question "what if" in an effort to build a bigger picture and fully understand the phenomenon under study. An example of this is the role and impact of that the size of a hotel chain could have on the learning and knowledge management activities of it. The findings showed that the size of the units and number of developers within a team might indicate the availability of resources available and therefore the possibility to engage in learning and knowledge management activities.

Stage 8 – Evaluation

Reflecting

Having completed the analysis of the data, an important part of the methodology is for the research to step back and reflect on the emergent understandings of the phenomenon. The findings were found to be rich and meaningful and provided insights into the mechanisms underpinning the learning and knowledge management processes during the internationalisation of hotel chains, as well as the useful types of knowledge acquired during expansion abroad and the importance of personal networks. As the main point of reference for this step is the conceptual framework (Farquhar, 2012; Yin, 2009), the new understandings were compared to the established literature positions and were found to be able to fit within the same framework, offering explanations and showing how these learning and knowledge management processes apply to hotel chains. Some authors argue that the analysis of qualitative data is not a distinct phase as such, but a simultaneous and continuous process (Bryman & Burgess, 2002). This stage of reflection continued until the completion of the thesis.

3.6 Conclusion

The methodology chapter has presented the underpinning philosophical assumptions, epistemological approach and research design and technique, utilised to answer the research question and objectives. The discussion on philosophies of research has shown the usefulness of a critical realist approach and the present study has benefited from viewing the particular phenomenon with these lenses, as it has allowed it to gain insights of the causal mechanisms that support knowledge and learning for hotel chains during internationalisation, and also to show how these link to specific outcomes. A qualitative research design was adopted in order to build the case study, using semi-structured interviews to collect data, as well as hotel chain documents and website analysis. The reasons behind the use of a non-random purposive sample for this research were explained. The population was defined as the development management teams of hotel chains, responsible for internationalisation projects, and for the purposes of this study, it was confined within the context of Europe. 16 interviews were conducted with senior members of the different development teams, until data saturation was achieved. The findings were thematically analysed using Nvivo and are presented in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Case findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the case findings derived from the empirical research, as they emerged from the thematic analysis, focusing on the objectives and research questions. The thesis seeks to provide an understanding of the learning and knowledge management mechanisms of hotel chains, during the process of internationalising, in order to address the gap in knowledge as identified in the review of the literature. More specifically, the research seeks to explore the way that hotel chains, gather, store, share and re-use knowledge and learnings obtained through expanding their operations abroad. Some of the other elements that the literature review found to be of importance and will also be investigated are: the role of management development teams, the role of the different types of knowledge and experiential knowledge in particular, and the impact that networks have in the process of hotel chain internationalisation. The thesis has followed a critical realist case study methodology, involving sixteen semi-structured in-depth interviews, via a non-random purposive sample. The research participants were senior members of the development teams of the targeted hotel chains, belonging to different organisational hierarchical levels, but holding a key role in the learning and knowledge management processes and mechanisms of their respective firms. The titles of the participant roles were: Vice president and senior vice president of international development, managing director or head of international development and development director. As explained in the methodology chapter, the recorded interviews were transcribed and the resulting data were coded and arranged in themes, as information and meanings emerged from the analysis. Further sub-themes emerged, as well as other relevant and useful findings which may support a more holistic understanding of these organisational processes and their importance.

The aim of this part of the thesis, is to allow for the categorisation of the findings, the organisation of them into meaningful themes. This will help provide a detailed analysis

of them, allowing for the case to be constructed, based on the themes as they emerge. The participant general characteristics that are related to the study are provided in the first section of the case findings. This is followed by looking into the mechanisms that allow knowledge to be captured, stored, re-used and be transferred within hotel chains, with a discussion around the role of networks within these processes. An analysis of the type and quality of knowledge that is useful to minimise internationalisation risks follows, with particular reference to the findings on the importance of EK within the internationalisation process of hotel chains and an exploration of the ways that it can be obtained. The chapter ends with an overall conclusion on the results of the research. Subject related quotes from the interviews and the consequent thematic analysis are presented in tables and within the text itself, in order to support a thorough understanding of the results and guide the analysis.

4.1.1 Participant profiles

The interview participants represented their respective international hotel chains and were selected based on their role within the organisation they work for. The role had to be of a senior level and responsible for decisions related to the internationalisation of the chain. As explained in the methodology, in order to develop an understanding of the case, three key role levels within the different hotel chain international development hierarchies were selected (global head/ MD/ SVP, VP, director).

After the introductory part of the interview, all participants were asked to confirm their position within the hotel chain they work for, their function, and explain their team structure. This was done in an effort to draw a picture of the hierarchical structure within the hotel chain internationalisation teams and attempt to develop an understanding of the dynamics within them. Other questions were also asked during the interviews, to build more holistic participant profiles, which in turn might provide further insights in the way that these individuals have responded. The individual participant profiles can be seen in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Interview participant profiles

Participant 1	The first interviewee confirmed that her current role was VP of development for Europe, for a single brand chain. She has worked for several other hotel chains in the past, in both a global and also regional capacity. She has 21 years of experience within hotel chain international development. She manages a team the involves several different direct reports, mainly directors of international development, focusing on different regions within Europe. Her main responsibility is expanding the footprint of the brand in Europe, through finding either existing hotels or new hotel projects in target locations, which would be ideal for the needs of the particular hotel chain. Although she has held the role of VP of development with the particular chain for two months only, she explained that her experience in development helped her to run the department straight away.
Participant 2	Participant 2 is a director of international development, for a multiple brand hotel chain, focusing on asset management and retention within the European continent and more specifically in the country of Germany as well as other location in Eastern and Southern Europe. She has 11 years of experience within international development and her role sits within several other internal functions such as designers, architects, analysts, investment analysts and legal consultants. She has worked for the particular hotel chain for almost two years. Prior to her joining international development, her background was investment analysis for a consultancy firm.
Participant 3	Participant 3 confirmed that she held the role of VP for development in Europe for a single brand chain. Her main duty is to grow the particular brand into the European continent and specifically: Germany, Scandinavia, UK, Ireland, Iceland, France, Italy and the Iberian Peninsula. She has held her current role for almost two years and has a total of 26 years of internationalisation experience within hotel chains. Her background is real estate. She manages a team of 4 staff: an analyst performing feasibility studies, an investment analyst and a development director, all reporting to her.

Participant 4	Participant 4 held the role of director of development, renewals, retentions and support for EMEA for two years, for a multi-brand hotel chain. She has however been with the company for a total of 9 years, in different roles, starting in hotel operations as a manager and moving into the role of feasibility manager later on.
Participant 5	Participant 5 has held the role of director of development for luxury brands for EMEA for two years. Although she has held the role within the current multi-brand hotel chain for one year, she has previously held the same role for a hotel chain that was acquired by it and continued within that capacity. She has a total of 6 years of experience in hotel chain internationalisation projects. Her role covers all luxury and upper upscale brands, and her main duty is to identify new opportunities in Europe. Her previous role was revenue management within foreign unit operations.
Participant 6	Participant 6's title is: managing director for property and hotel chain 6 international. He represents a single brand hotel chain. His duties include two main functions: real estate, buying, constructing, managing, refurbishing and selling property, as well as international hotels, focusing on the middle east and currently Germany. He has been working within this capacity for the particular hotel chain for 12 years and has a total of 30 years of internationalisation work. His prior experiences focused on international expansion projects for a supermarket chain.
Participant 7	Participant 7 is an international development director responsible for the expansion of the hotel chain portfolio of brands in various different countries. He has been for two years with the particular hotel chain and has a total of 29 years of internationalisation experience through work in different hotel chains.
Participant 8	Currently working as senior VP of development, participant 8 is also a member of the management board for the hotel chain he represents. He is the global head in charge of the international development of the hotel chain, focusing on expansion to new locations around the world. He has been with the particular single brand hotel chain for 19 years. He started his career in the particular hotel chain as a development manager and worked his way up to his current role. His past experiences also involved hotel operations.

Participant 9	Participant 9 has held the role of regional VP for western Europe for a multi brand hotel chain. He manages a team of 8 staff who are based in various parts of western Europe and his role focuses on developing new properties within the particular region. His role reports to the hotel chain chief development officer for Europe. In the past, he worked for a different hotel chain, within a similar capacity. He has held his current role for 13 years and his overall experience in international development is 22 years.
Participant 10	Participant 10 is the global head of international development for a multi brand hotel chain. Several different regional directors report to her. She has been working for the particular hotel chain for 18 years in total, with 9 of those years in her current capacity. She previously worked in the legal department of the same hotel chain department, as her background and studies followed a legal background.
Participant 11	Participant 11 has worked for the single brand hotel chain he represents for 7 years now, within the capacity of international development executive. This is his first role in international development, and his studies were on hotel investment. He works in a small team of 3 members of staff in total, a development analyst and a development manager. Their role, as a department, focuses on identifying new opportunities for expanding into new international locations.
Participant 12	Participant 12 has held the role of VP of international development for Europe for 1 year now and his total experience in hotel chain international development is 12 years. The hotel chain he works for has several different brands. He reports to the head of global development and manages a team of 7: 3 midscale and economy developers, 1 luxury developer, 1 development analyst, 1 international operations manager and a PA. His background is hotel operations, hotel sales, distribution and e-commerce.
Participant 13	Participant 13 is the senior VP for global development for a multi brand hotel chain. His role focuses on the international growth of the hotel chain and currently focuses on Europe and Latin America. He reports to the chief of assets and development. He manages several different regional teams with different numbers of staff in each one of them. These teams have duals functions working on international development projects and asset management at the same time. He joined the particular hotel chain one year ago and has a total experience of 16 years in international projects for

	hotel chains. His background is real estate and consultancy services (15 years).
Participant 14	Participant 14 is a director of international development for a single brand hotel chain. Her role focused on identifying and securing new hotel projects in Europe. She reports to a senior VP of international development and has a development analyst reporting to her. She has been with the hotel chain for one and a half year and prior to that worked for a consulting firm, specialising in hotel investments and development. She has a total of 14 years in international hotel development.
Participant 15	Participant 15 is executive VP of acquisitions and development for a multi brand hotel chain. His area of responsibility is EMEA, but the primary focus is on Europe. He reports to the chief investment officer, who sits on the executive committee. He manages a small team of 3 staff. He has worked for the specific hotel chain for 10 years. His background is in advisory services in real estate and hotel development. He has a total of 23 years in international development.
Participant 16	Participant 16 is the VP of international development for Europe, for a multi brand hotel chain and he has been in this role for two years. He has several regional heads of development reporting to him as well as a European administrative team with supporting functions for the heads. He reports to the head of international development for EMEA. His background is investment banking and started with the particular hotel chain in finance and investor relations. From there he focused on financial planning and budgeting.

Source: Compiled by the author using interview data

Other characteristics of the participants were also recorded: the years of development experience, the gender, whether their hotel chain has multiple brands or a single brand, the hotel chain country of origin and the area coverage for their particular role. All these have been summarised in figure 4.1 bellow.

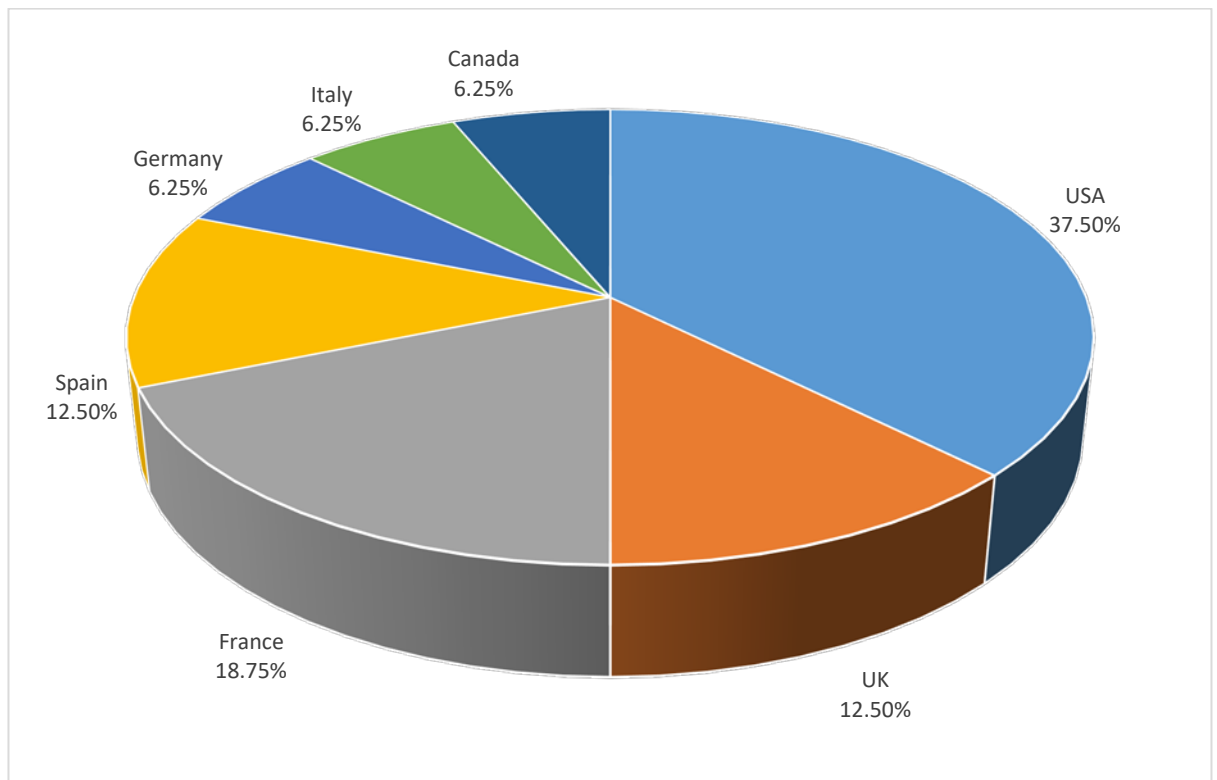
Figure 4.1: Interview participant characteristics

Participant number	DevelopmentExperience	Gender	Hotel Chain Brand Tier	Hotel Chain Country of Ownership	Role	Role coverage
Interviewee 1	21	Female	Single brand	USA	VP	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 2	11	Female	Multi brand	UK	Director	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 3	26	Female	Multi brand	USA	VP	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 4	11	Female	Multi brand	USA	Director	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 5	6	Female	Multi brand	France	Director	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 6	30	Male	Single brand	UK	MD/ Global Head	Global
Interviewee 7	29	Male	Multi brand	France	MD/ Global Head	Global
Interviewee 8	19	Male	Single brand	Germany	SVP	Global
Interviewee 9	22	Male	Multi brand	USA	VP	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 10	20	Female	Multi brand	Spain	MD/ Global Head	Global
Interviewee 11	10	Male	Single brand	Italy	Director	Global
Interviewee 12	12	Male	Multi brand	France	VP	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 13	16	Male	Multi brand	Spain	SVP	Global
Interviewee 14	13	Female	Single brand	Canada	Director	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 15	23	Male	Multi brand	USA	VP	EU/ EMEA
Interviewee 16	20	Male	Multi brand	USA	VP	EU/ EMEA

Source: Compiled by the author using interview data

Although the gender of the participant interviewees might not directly link to the study and its aims and objectives, it is noted that seven of them were females and nine of them males. The majority of the participants interviewed, held the role of vice president of international development (6). Three participants held the role of managing director or global head of international development, two that of senior vice president, and five that of director of international development. The managing directors of international development were on the same level as global heads of international development and in some cases the senior VPs as well. Most of the participants were working for multi-tier and multi-branded hotel chains, and five of them working for single branded chains. Although this research was restricted in hotel chains with operations in the European continent, it would be also important to mention were their HQs or area of origin is based. The area of origin for the majority of these chains was within the European continent (9), six in the United States of America and one in Canada. From a country perspective, most of the chains were from the United States of America (See figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Hotel chain country of ownership



Source: Compiled by the author using interview data

Different interviewees explained that the job titles within hotel development are not consisted across the industry and can differ from hotel chain to hotel chain, although some are very similar. An example of this came from participant 10 who as the global head of international development has several different regional directors of international development reporting to her and are of a VP level, when comparing their duties and responsibilities in other hotel chains. This is analysed further in the next chapter.

4.1.2 Administrative structure of hotel chain international development departments

The research into the online hotel chain development resources as well as the data collected from the interviews have provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of how the international development team hierarchies are structured, what the similarities are and what the differences. Below is a comparison between the development team administrative structures of: a small sized (16 properties) in figure

4.3, a medium sized (400 properties) in figure 4.4, and a large sized international hotel chain (3,500) in figure 4.5.

Figure 4.3: Development team structure of a small sized hotel chain

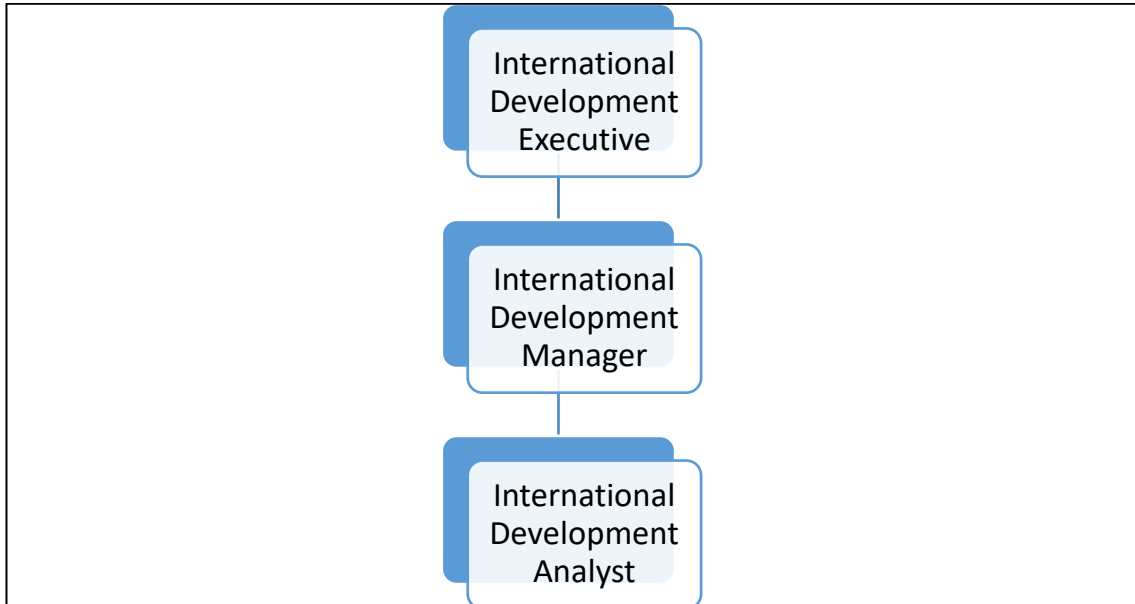


Figure 4.4: Development team structure of a medium sized hotel chain

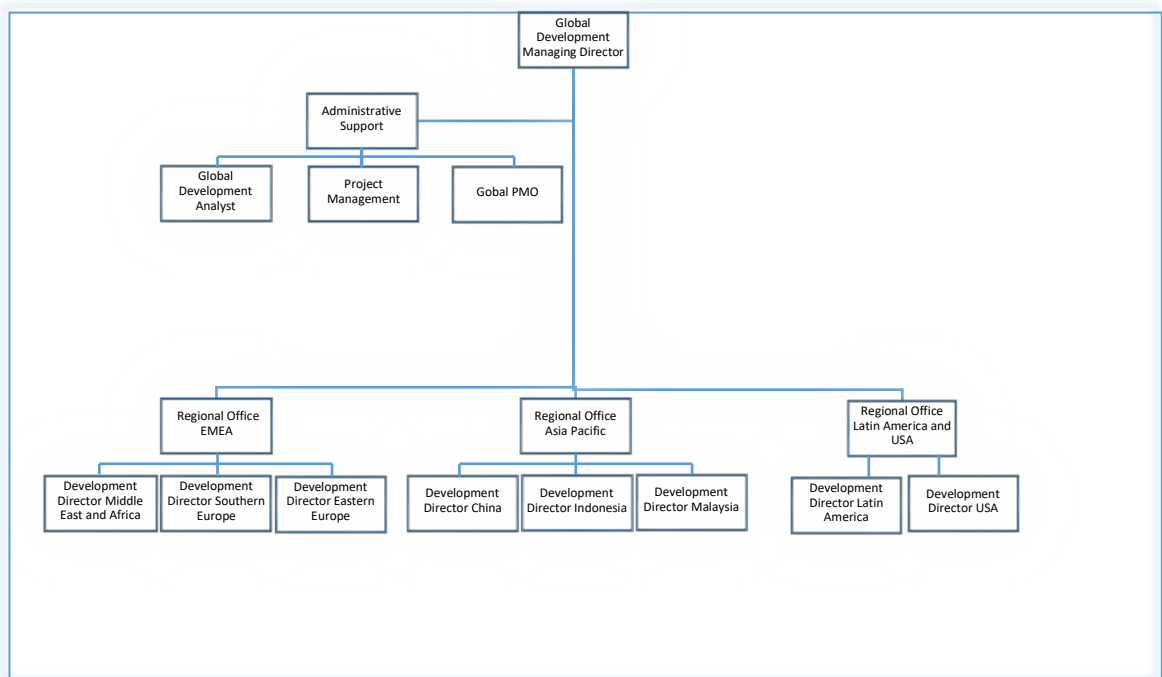
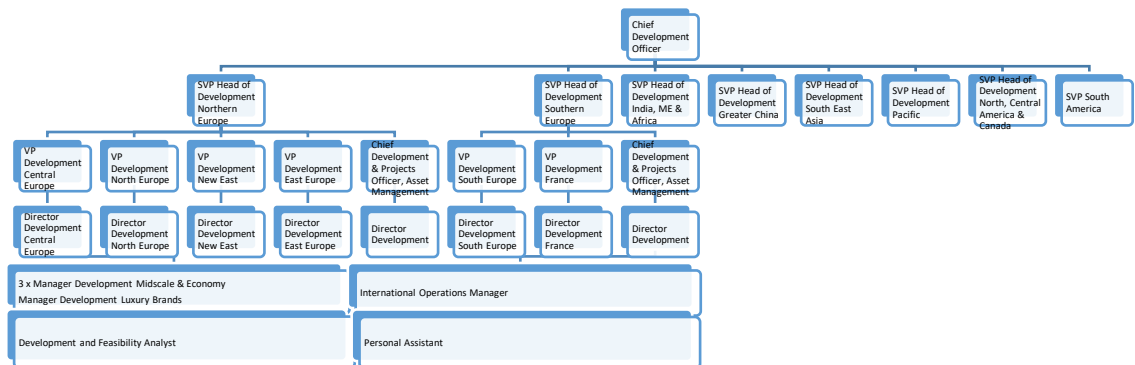


Figure 4.5: Development team structure of a large sized hotel chain



Although the sizes of hotel chains fall under the general definitions for SMEs and MNEs, the above three hierarchical structures are used to demonstrate the differences between structures according to the number of properties managed, and the complexity of the team structures, rather than the number of staff employed and turnover generated (EU recommendation 2003/361). While a small sized business would need to employ less than 50 employees and have a turnover of less than 10 million euros, a medium sized business would need to employ less than 250 employees and have a turnover of less than 50 million euros. Anything above these figures would be classed as a large MNE. The smaller hotel chain (figure 4.3) manages 16 properties and has the simplest structure out of the three other development team structures, with 3 staff only, looking after all global expansion efforts for the business. The medium sized hotel chain displays more complexity, with the global head of international development overlooking three regional offices and having 8 direct reports by the different development directors in charge of sub-regions within the regional offices. The three

wider regions are: EMEA, Asia Pacific and the USA, which show the current strategic focus of the particular hotel chain. In this structure the directors of international development are directly in charge of the specific sub-regions they look after and are all of an equivalent rank. The global head of international development also has the support of an administrative development team, which provides assistance through an analyst, a project manager and a personal assistant. The style of the structure is very similar with the small sized hotel chain development team, with more direct reports and less breakdowns of regions. It is interesting to note that there are no SVPs, VPs or development managers in the small and medium sized structures. The large sized hotel chain development structure example is much more complex, with a large and more in-depth breakdowns of regions around the world, as well as more positions to support the regional operations. More specifically, the chief development officer is responsible for the entire international development strategy. This position has 8 direct reports by the senior vice presidents, overlooking the development of their respective regions: North Europe, Southern Europe, Indian ME & Africa, Greater China, South East Asia, Pacific, North Central America & Canada, South America. For demonstration purposes, only the full hierarchy of the European regions have been presented, however, all of the regional offices, follow the same structure, with VPs looking after sub-regions and the corresponding directors of development reporting to them. Both European teams (northern and southern) share a team of supporting services: 3 managers of development for midscale and economy brands, one manager of development for luxury brands, one development and feasibility analyst, an international operations manager and a PA. The other world regions also benefit from the same supporting services, with however a different number of brand managers, depending on regional needs.

In the examples presented above, the small sized hotel chain development team is based within the business HQs in Europe. In the medium sized hotel chain example, the development team for EMEA is also based within the business HQs in Europe, together with the administrative support team and the managing director of global development. The other two regional offices are based locally in those regions. In the large sized hotel chain example, the chief development officer, together with the European SVPs and

their teams, are all based within the business HQs in Europe. All other SVPs and their teams are based locally in their regions of responsibility. All participants explained that having locally based offices supports the operations and helps create local networks which will further support the development in the particular location. They also explained that the regional teams do not have direct contact with other regional teams through formal hotel chain structures and all communications between different regions take place on a regional SVP or HQ level. This point is examined in detail later on in the chapter examining knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer within hotel chains.

4.2 Hotel chain internationalisation knowledge and learning mechanisms

As seen in the literature review, one of the major gaps in hotel chain internationalisation theory, is the identification of the mechanisms that hotel chains use, in order to capture, store, re-use and transfer experiential knowledge from their international expansion projects, within their organisation and within their internationalisation processes and structures. These KM mechanisms are also related to the ACAP a hotel chain has. This section explores each of these hotel chain activities in an effort to understand what they entail, how they all link together and identify the sources of internationalisation knowledge. The findings have been categorised under four main processes that take place during international expansion projects: knowledge acquisition; storing the acquired knowledge; transfer of internationalisation knowledge; re-application of stored knowledge.

4.2.1 Knowledge acquisition

This part analyses the views of the interviewees, on the ways that internationalisation knowledge is captured by hotel chains during expansion projects. Essentially this presents the ways that hotel chains learn during the internationalisation process. The capturing of knowledge refers to the learning mechanisms of hotel chains, that are capable of recording knowledge and integrating it into their internal processes and also transforming experiential knowledge into objective knowledge.

The interviewee quotes related to the node of knowledge acquisition, have been categorised into two broader themes according to the type of knowledge they can relate to: objective knowledge (explicit knowledge) and experiential knowledge (tacit knowledge). A third theme was added to include those who stated that they do not have any mechanisms in place, those that are not aware of any, those that do not share their learnings, and finally those who stated that they wished they did but currently do not. The first two main categories will be further analysed following the new knowledge acquisition sources taxonomy that was devised by Fletcher and Harris (2012), largely based on previous work done by Huber (1991), as presented in the literature review (figure 4.6). This looks into EK in terms of internal (direct experience) and external (indirect experience: vicarious learning and grafting) sources of knowledge, and OK in terms of internal and external research. Although according to Casillas et al. (2015), Huber’s (1991) knowledge acquisition categories cover the full range of knowledge types available to a business, the analysis is made with open mind, allowing for other points to interest to emerge.

Figure 4.6: New knowledge acquisition sources

	Internal source	External source
Experiential knowledge	Direct Experience	Indirect experience: vicarious learning and grafting
Objective knowledge	Internal Information	External search

Source: Fletcher and Harris (2012)

Acquisition of objective knowledge

This section covers the themes on capturing explicit knowledge through two different ways (internal and external).

Int. 12 (VP) explained that as the hotel chain wishes to expand abroad, they start producing their own internal feasibility studies, which investigate the potentially interesting markets and provide a detailed feasibility overview. There are dedicated managers or analysts that produce these reports, making sure that they are up to date. Int. 1 (VP) stated that they tend to research markets that their consumers might wish to travel to and stay, markets that do well, with high hotel occupancy rates and high room rates achieved, as well as 'up and coming markets'. Int. 8 (SVP), explained that they try and research as much as they can, "obviously often tapping into the knowledge that we have in house". In house knowledge was referenced several times by the interviewees and referred to the general pool of knowledge within the organisation, including personal experiences, previous reports and feasibility studies, as well as knowledge readily available through information systems. Int. 5 (director) added a further dimension into this, describing the usefulness of a local partner in terms of providing additional feasibility studies:

"And because we don't have the knowledge of the market, we would need to make sure that we have extra feasibility studies, from, so that's something we would always ask from our partner there to do and to have, to make sure it makes sense."

According to Int. 5, the local partnership above might refer to a current or potential partner, through a franchise, management agreement, or other management services provider. This relationship can offer a unique and well-informed insight into a local market and its' peculiarities. One of the main reasons that this type of knowledge is included in this analysis is the degree of tacitness that might be included in it. Int. 15

(VP), added that for markets that might not be on the priority list of the hotel chain, they might invite the developer (partner) to provide them with feasibility studies:

“And then sometimes, often, times, you know, especially in some markets, we say well dear developer we, you know, we remain open to, to look at your opportunity, but please provide us with a third-party feasibility study.”

In this way, the local partner/ interested party, is also responsible for providing a convincing scenario to the hotel chain, something which the hotel chain will then have to investigate further, should the feasibility study be attractive. Int. 7 (global head), emphasised the value of partners in providing local experience and knowledge, as the sole and most valuable source of local knowledge:

“remember that we are expanding by partners, so in that sort of experience, commercial experience to local level, you know, that is, that experience curve is being absorbed by our local partner. What we’re absorbing is the relationship with our partner. We are to remove directly from that experience in that local market... I think, in terms of sort of a big picture, it is our local partners who we rely on to absorb a hotel, the local hotel dynamic, when I mean local I mean collectively the national hotel dynamic of each country, we are absorbing, learning mostly the cultural and commercial experience between ourselves and our partner.”

The degree of this reliance and behaviour however would depend on the mode of entry chosen by the hotel chain. The particular hotel chain (Int. 7) uses only partners in expanding, mainly franchise agreements, and do not invest in other projects, such as FDI.

Outsourcing research analysis on international markets, is another way of obtaining local knowledge for hotel chains. Int. 15 (VP) explained that they use third party data sources that are established in the industry, such as “Smith travel, AMPM and some real estate pipeline type reports”. Int. 8 added that they also obtain knowledge on

international markets through market reviews, consultants reports, internal marketing and sales reports and updates, travel agent and wholesaler reports, general newsletters, consultant reports (local and international), competitor annual reports, general country snapshots and general online sources such as the economist and the CIA world fact book.

As explained by the interviewees, some of the information that is gathered and deemed to be of future interest, is stored. Int. 8 (SVP) specifically mentioned that some of the reasons are that there might be different projects they are working on, at different times, but same destination, or same country. They therefore go back to this information and refresh it, through the previously mentioned sources (see fig. 4.6 above). This way the particular reports and information remain relevant and ready to use.

Acquisition of tacit knowledge

As previously discussed, in this section, the analysis of the findings has been organised through three knowledge source categories: direct, vicarious and grafted (Fletcher & Harris, 2012).

Internal Direct (acquisition of tacit knowledge)

The section on direct acquisition of tacit knowledge contains interview quotes that relate to internal processes and information.

The first way of capturing experiential knowledge in this section is by direct exposure. As analysed in the literature review, this is knowledge that derives from the hotel chain's direct exposure and activities in international markets. The interviewees explained that this type of knowledge is extremely important, as despite the risks involved, it provides hotel chains with direct exposure to international operations, providing direct experiential learning. It was found that the exposure of the hotel chain to international markets can occur as part of 'controlled exposure' for new developers or as a part of a

full internationalising activity abroad by an already experienced member of the development team. The term 'controlled exposure' is used for the instances that new and inexperienced members of the hotel chain development team are learning 'on the job'. Int. 5 (director) explained that in the hotel development industry in general, from her experience, there is not real training for the core duties as such:

"There is no real training, it's something really... I would say it's more like you either know it or you don't, so you just learn by experience, because it's also every single project is very different. I don't have one project that's been the same."

The interviews revealed that some internal training does take place when a developer joins a hotel chain, but this focuses on basic administrative knowledge: managerial accounting, feasibility study modules and value real estate. When it comes to international project learning, developers are exposed to different international projects, and learn by trial and error, with sometimes the support of a more senior manager. Int. 5 (director) explained that the hotel chain has lawyers that always check what the developer does, to ensure the correctness of the deals. The statement that each project is very different, complicates things even more when it comes to transforming these learnings into organisational objective knowledge. Int. 8 (SVP), also added that hotel chains try to break projects into smaller learnings for the new developer to be exposed to:

"Yes, it's on the job, it's really on the job. It's dissecting it and dissecting the whole process into its various parts and then breaking it down and getting them to work out, you know, one chunk at a time, or two or three and just trying out and I correct, and I guide, point to the right direction and see how that evolves over time."

On the other hand, the main way of acquiring tacit knowledge (internal and direct experience, Fig. 4.6) is by full exposure of the hotel chains to foreign markets. This exposure involves the full mechanisms of the hotel chain, on all levels. The developers deal with each step of the internationalisation process, which can be very complex and

can also last for years, while they develop their knowledge gradually as they go along. The process involves numerous steps, from the initial identification of the need to internationalise, all the way to the signing of a project deal and then continuing with the maintenance of that particular relationship and the deal-renewal. This experience will depend on the type of mode of entry the hotel chain is using. An example of the duration of a management contract mode of entry relationship was provided by Int. 1 (VP), who explained that they are looking to enter into very long-term agreements, usually above 50 years. Int. 2 (director) stated that their franchise agreements are for 20 years. All the interviewees argued that there are multiple projects taking place at the same time, all are at different stages and could potentially also be at different markets or even very distant geographical locations. All of the interviewees were based in Europe and the responsibility for most of them was Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), with some of them looking after Russia and some others the entire world. This exposure therefore is not at a steady pace or ordered, and can include numerous different cultural elements, dealing with different aspects of a project at different stages, and as Int. 1 (VP) explained, even dealing with operational issues at times. This vast experience and intuition that develops over time and through an increasing number of different deals, stays with the developer as individual tacit knowledge. All interviewees agreed that the embeddedness of individual tacit knowledge presents several challenges when it comes to transforming it into objective knowledge. The interviews have shown a number of different ways that hotel chains deal with this and are analysed below:

Meetings

One of the efforts of transforming the individually gained experience into explicit knowledge is by getting the developer team together and facilitating the exchange of ideas and information. Int. 3, a VP for a multi brand hotel chain, explained that the entire development team meets on a weekly basis:

“I encourage on a weekly basis my team to all sit together, we talk about what we’ve done that week, the meetings we went to, and out of that we talk about learnings from the week. And at the end of each project, we tend to have sit down

where we'll say, OK what could we have done differently what could we have done better... we don't do it in a formal way, we don't have a depository where things get put, but we do, we do try to, you know to, yeah we do kinda that short of oral review."

Most of the developers mentioned team meetings that take place, annually, biannually or even every four years (Int. 9 - VP) in the form of normal meeting 'catch ups', conferences, or team building exercises. Some others again mentioned that they could not remember when they last been to a meeting like that. The analysis has shown that the meetings seem to occur more frequently on a local or regional basis, while on a cross-regional or global basis seem to be more uncommon. These meetings however do not seem to always be about the exchange of ideas, or solely focus on sharing internationalisation experiences, but have a wider purpose, and sometimes involve other internal functions as well. According to Int. 9, sales and marketing, property owners and developing partners, might sometimes join these meetings or conferences, something which encourages the exchange of knowledge. This however seems to be a rare occurrence, as most of the interviewees seem to be absorbed in their day-to-day routine, with meetings on an occasional basis, seen as something the company must be seen to be doing, rather than a depository of experiential knowledge or a way of capturing that experience embedded within the development team. Int. 7 (global head), mentioned that they have a monthly development board, when partner projects are presented to the board for approval:

"in order to have those approved, there is a dialog between the partners, and it is related to individual projects are rehearsed, perhaps focused on before they present it. There is a dialog between us and the partners again once as the projects are presented for approval there".

The same hotel chain (multi brand) organises an annual partners meeting, which aims to present the development strategies of the company, annual targets by the partners, and also to discuss issues that come up during the internationalisation process. This exchange of information and encouragement of communications with partners, seems

to be unique for the particular hotel chain. Int. 3 (VP) stated that in their annual meeting, the hotel chain brings together teams that cover EMEA, as each region has its own team, and every two years, they also include other regions of the world, such as Asia and the Americas. In their meeting they tend to discuss what works in their regions, what works for them, issues they had to deal with and the outcomes of different projects. Int. 10 (global head) explained that they do have annual team meetings, but they stay within their regional boundaries, and not cross borders, as they do not see the relevance, as each region differs. One of the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data and relates to the effectiveness of meetings for the exchange of knowledge, is the issue of the embeddedness of knowledge as well as the lack of mechanisms to capture it and transform it into explicit. Two characteristic quotes, that highlight on one hand how knowledge is shared and transferred and on the other the embedded nature of it and also the difficulty of capturing it, can be seen in the table below:

Int. 3:	<i>“when we get together with people from various different parts of the globe or the region, we all talk about how lovely it would be to have a shared drive where we can deposit materials or we could share information, and the reality is that as we go back to our office, and we’re so absorbed in what we’re doing that we don’t do that.” (Int. 3 – VP)</i>
Int. 5:	<i>“But then there is a lot of things that are being done through the meetings that you can’t really write down, that are just in my head.” (Int. 5 – Director)</i>

Reporting

Hotel chains have reporting lines established throughout their hierarchy. The development teams seem to have very clear internal reporting routes. All of the interviewees stated that all members of the development team report back to HQ on their work. Int. 2 (director) explained that they capture expansion projects at different stages in time, through reports, in terms of their development, what has happened, what the decisions are and how they have reached that point. These documents are archived and kept for some time. The keeping of records however, does not seem to be standard practice, as some of the interviewees were not aware of a formal record

keeping approach. Int. 13 (SVP) also explained that when they close a deal and sign a contract, they have to prepare a summary report, that goes to different departments of the hotel chain that might have an interest in it. This report includes the major points of the contract and what exactly has been signed, as each deal tends to include unique details. The reporting practice of hotel chains seems to involve formal and informal meetings, with verbal and non-verbal reporting, the circulation of several different documents, that “will consolidate some of the experience, some of the thinking and some of the trends”, but most of the time “it’s more informal and relationship built, rather than formal and documented” (Int. 6 - global Head of development for a single brand hotel chain).

There seem to be clear reporting lines for the development teams in hotel chains, but when it comes to capturing the experiential knowledge available, there are inadequate mechanisms in place that would ensure the maximum possible amount of experiential learning is acquired.

Recording best practices

According to Int. 16 (VP), the particular multi brand hotel chain organises a hotel chain development leadership team meeting frequently for different purposes, through which they share best practice. He also stated that they organise team wide (development) meetings once or twice a year to exchange ideas. It was not clear however if these meetings on exchange of ideas and best practice focus on internationalisation experience, or on other topics such as strategy or finance for example. Int. 14 (director), also mentioned the practice of sharing best practice, in terms of things that can be done better, and Int. 1 (VP), explained that that only some companies do it:

“No company that I ever worked at does that... I mean some of the big brands I worked for, I think Starwood and IHG, they had something whereby you know each team within the company, for whatever sector you worked in, was responsible for noting down best practices.”

Only three of the interviewees mentioned the practice of recording best practices. It seems that this is something that does happen, but as a practice it might not be as widespread. As Int. 1 (VP), referred to this activity as something that bigger brands would do, recording best practices and making sure these are available across different teams, might involve resources that hotel chains of smaller size, might not be able to utilise.

Succession planning

Another way that hotel chains acquire tacit knowledge is through succession planning. According to some of the interviewees, being proactive and planning ahead in order to protect experiential knowledge and ensure it stays within the business, is of an imperative importance. Int. 5, a director of development, explained that the nature of the business is such that a developer would learn by doing:

“you get assigned some help, follow your boss or someone else, another developer, to fill in any gaps”.

In this way, some experiential knowledge will be transferred from one person to the other. Int. 3 (VP), referred to their standard practice of not allowing individual developers to become aligned to a particular organisation, partner or project. It is their practice that they always assign two developers per activity, in order to protect the particular relationship should one of these two people leave. She further explained that one of the two assigned developers usually holds the primary relationship, but both are working on it. Int. 6 (global head) referred to a more robust process of succession planning and talent management, in order to retain tacit knowledge within the business:

“So our biggest focus is on succession planning for individuals, and we would expect, expect the person who is the person that you’re talking about leaving to be sharing information continually with that successor.”

He further explained however, that: “naturally, if somebody goes, there is a limit to what you will get out of them”. According to all interviewees, their resignation notice period is usually between three to six months. As part of the succession planning and training that most hotel chains have, someone who has been identified as a successor, is paired to someone else and start working together. Things might become challenging however when it comes to what some interviewees referred to as ‘hostile departure’, by which a developer is no longer capable of carrying out his or her duty as per the company policy, and needs to leave the company as soon as possible, without even serving the notice period. Generally, all hotel chains have a very thorough exit process and succession planning in place, however, as Int. 6 explained, “it is never perfect”. In this way, some of the tacit knowledge is transformed into objective knowledge and it is available for the company to use. Some of it however, is transferred by developer to developer and remains tacit.

Information system

This section contains all the interview references that were related to a system, usually electronic, through which tacit knowledge can be acquired. These systems, or processes, range from tailored SharePoint systems for specific use by the development teams of hotel chains, to Google Docs and email. It is interesting to note that none of the interviewees, when referring to these systems, used the term ‘knowledge management system’.

Most of the interviewees mentioned a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system in place, called Salesforce. The particular system provides a platform through which developers can manage client accounts, track expansion projects, add background stories on clients/ partners, and other functions. According to Int. 3 (VP), they log every project into the system so that the entire team can see at which stage each project is and keep track of what is happening. However, as she explained: “it is less related to personal experiences”. Int. 1 (VP), described a more thorough use of the system, through which they add more details on the relationships that they are building, and information on possible suitable investors in other regions of the world, “but again

that's not really about cultural learnings, its more about relationship building". Int. 8 (SVP), also explained that they do not use the system for lessons or experiences gained:

"We don't, projecting that to recording, you know, lessons learned, and experiences gained we definitely don't. We use it as a, at a very basic level at this stage."

Although, a developer might use this system as a purely CRM system, it seems however, that the particular system allows for a certain amount of tacit knowledge to be captured, in the form of comments, opinions and other relevant information, that might help the next person reading it to understand the situation and learn from it. Therefore, there might be some potential to develop this function even more. It has to be noted that some of the interviewees expressed concern on placing projects on a system, in terms of who would have access to that information. In some of the hotel chains, the head of development decides who will have access to what project and how much detail they can see, something which can create communication issues:

Int. 5: *"Because at the moment, we only learn through the company vice president who we're working with, and he might say, oh we actually have another project there and there, so we have an issue of communication, I would say, which is quite big."*
– (Int. 5 -Director)

According to most of the interviewees however, this shared knowledge is openly accessible to the entire team.

Some of the interviewees described tailored made systems, similar to Salesforce, that allow for different functions to be included. Int. 10 (global head), explained that the program they have in place, allows for each project to include, all of the data concerning it, such as feasibility analyses, market analyses, financing documents and other process related documents, including comments, notes and reports by the developer. Int. 10 (global head) also described how they have also added risk specifications for each project, and how much of that 'risk' a developer is allowed.

One of the most important information that all interviewees agreed on, was the contacts details, some of which are private, of partners and investors, to which everyone needs to have access to, as they do not allow developers to keep their own individual details and contacts book. Int. 6 (global head), mentioned three different systems in place, for three different geographical locations. The particular system allows for audit plays as well, something different from all other sources so far examined. The audio records are introductions to customers; however they do present an innovative and different way of capturing information.

The majority of the interviewees mentioned using a combination of systems, such as the above (Salesforce or custom-made CRM system), with another electronic media, such as SharePoint, hotel chain intranet or shared storage folder and applications such as Excel or simply email. Int. 7 (global head) described the use of email, as “the ultimate trail or administrative decision-making tool”. Int. 13 (SVP) mentioned that success stories from the development world are shared via email and are also available on the intranet, within their hotel chain. Most of the interviewees that have a shared folder system in place, described the benefit of having a central storage space, that developers can access and retrieve the information they need. There seem to be however issues with navigating across information centrally stored:

Int. 8: “Again, it’s not always obvious where to go and look for it, in the system, but it’s there, yes.”

“the challenge with systems and you know, filling in databases, it creates a lot of work and not necessarily, you know, people are too lazy to actually go and look for it and so a lot of information tends to get lost anyway.” (Int. 8 – SVP)

Int. 3 (VP), explained that they have assigned one person as a keeper of the shared drive, making sure that it stays clean. The issue however remains when it comes to capturing experiential knowledge, as the shared access point would still have the same kind of reports and documents, with the only difference being the ease of access and centrality of location.

Internal Networks

The internal networks in the particular case, are the formal and hierarchical structures throughout the hotel chain, as well as the informal relationships between employees, based on frequency of communication and emotional attachment. Keeping the development department as central in these networks, the internal formal network involves other departments within the HQs, such as finance, marketing and sales, other development teams that might be geographically based elsewhere and the management of sub-units.

Most of the interviewees, described the interactions between members of the development team as being very important. These interactions and exchanges of information, seem to take place randomly, informally and on a high frequency, much more than formal interactions take place:

Int. 2: “experiential knowledge is by definition informal. It doesn’t happen though, it doesn’t happen in the context of structure and recording or something like this that happens when people have conversations or someone takes the time to sit down and say let me help you out there, let me tell you this and that, that is informal and that happens quite often I would reckon. (Int.2 – director)

Int. 4 (director), further explained that these relevant stakeholders include other departments that are involved in the internationalisation process of the hotel chain, as well as other development colleagues. Int. 7 (global head), supported as more useful the informal nature of the tacit knowledge exchange networks, due to their workload. The number of hotel expansion projects they have to deal with at the same time and their target figures, seem to be the main reasons behind a more flexible way of acquiring tacit knowledge internally.

Int. 8 (SVP) also described how a member of the development team, would reach out to the management for help:

“you can be sure that whenever a challenge occurs, you know, they call on us and say, Int. 8, what did you mean when you drafted this clause in this agreement, here is the challenge what can we do about it. So, there is ongoing feedback, there is ongoing sharing, but its perhaps less formalised.”

It has to be noted, that the informal processes seem to be more prevalent and more effective in the acquisition of knowledge within the development teams of hotel chains. Int. 6 (global head) characteristically stated that the acquisition of knowledge from other development members is: “more informal and relationship built, rather than formal and documented”.

Most interviewees have described extensive face to face contact taking place within their hotel chains for the purpose of information exchange and sharing of experiences. Int. 8 (SVP) described how the development team works better as a decentralised team and how they also work well with other internal departments:

Int. 8: “So, we are decentralised, we work as a team, we are also, in terms of the structure, in terms of development, we are very transversal, we work with all other departments, so in and of itself that means there is also a lot of transversal exchange of information which is very useful.”

Int. 8, however explained that because of the decentralised structure, a lot of the learning and acquisition of tacit knowledge is not captured and recorded in a formal manner, and therefore stays within individuals.

An interesting point that emerged through the interviews, is that the majority of the interviewees, described how they encourage and support knowledge exchange and communications within their own regional teams, with little or no mention of cross-collaboration between the teams of different regions. It seems however that on a lower hierarchical level, there is an informal exchange of objective knowledge, of more ‘weak tie’ nature:

Int. 3: "One of the things that we are... so that is more of an informal basis, we always talking to one another, about capital sources. So Leya from China might email me to say, I met this great guy today, I'm trying to do a Hotel Chain 3 Brand 1 with him in Shanghai and by the way did you know those two hotels and who should we chat him to talk about Hotel Chain 3. So capital sources particularly are something that we, we make sure that we collaborate on a very regular basis." (Int. 3 – VP)

The above reference is from a director level interviewee. Another point that seems to affect these informal networks, is the type of information or objective knowledge that is exchanged. In this particular reference, the interviewee explains how there is always collaboration when it comes to capital sources.

Int. 8 (SVP) described how the development team works better as a decentralised team and how they also work well with other internal departments:

Int. 8: "So, we are decentralised, we work as a team, we are also, in terms of the structure, in terms of development, we are very transversal, we work with all other departments, so in and of itself that means there is also a lot of transversal exchange of information which is very useful."

Overall, internal networks seem to be capable of facilitating tacit knowledge exchange. From these, according to the interviewees, those of an informal nature seem to benefit more the exchange of experiential knowledge. Another factor that benefits this, is a decentralised approach to management, which promotes the flexibility of more informal networks to operate, which seem to function better and support the sharing of learnings. Finally, it seems that 'strong ties' function better for the transfer of tacit knowledge internally, while 'weak ties' work better, for the transfer of explicit knowledge across sub-units or teams in other regions.

External acquisition of tacit knowledge

The interviewees explained that they may seek experiential knowledge externally when necessary, through the use of formal or informal networks or by recruiting an experienced professional to join their development teams. These two themes of external acquisition of tacit knowledge emerged through the analysis of the findings, and are being covered below, under the general themes of 'vicarious learning' and 'grafting', taken from the literature (Fletcher & Harris, 2012).

Vicarious learning

According to the interview data, it seems that hotel chains tend to rely more on their partner networks, rather than any other external source. All of the interviewees agreed on the importance of their partner relationship in generating international knowledge. This is something natural, considering the fact that most of the hotel chains that were researched, are internationalising through partners, which would be characterised as a 'strong tie':

Int. 7: "What I'm looking for, are partners. Partners who will either represent us or joint venture up, joint venture with us, in countries where they have the local market knowledge."

"remember that we are expanding by partners, so in that sort of experience, commercial experience to local level, you know, that is, that experience curve is being absorbed by our local partner. What we're absorbing is the relationship with our partner. We are to remove directly from that experience in that local market." (Int. 7 – global head)

Most interviewees described that this local knowledge does not usually involve a cost as such, when the partner is interested and has approached the hotel chain for a collaboration. Int. 8, explained that they have a deep network of knowledgeable hoteliers that they tend to utilise, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of a market. Int. 5 (director) also characteristically stated:

Int. 5: "And because we don't have the knowledge of the market, we would need to make sure that we have extra feasibility studies, from, so that's something we would always ask from our partner there to do and to have, to make sure its, it makes sense."

This type of knowledge acquisition seems covers several different elements, such as cultural and market understandings. The local partnerships that the interviewees referred to, do not only include hoteliers, but extend beyond this. They described the use of local, or international experts that can support them in their internationalisation efforts. These experts can range, from lawyers, and consultants, to architects and human resource agents:

Int. 6: "I have to recruit that in the country, because it's so specific we would employ those skills in the country, either in the Middle East or in Germany. So we brought those skills in, because some of our skills don't translate out to those countries. This is basic of how you design something internally, but actual local requirement sometimes overrule the knowledge of the experience we have, so we've adapted and brought in that expertise when we've needed it and equally with something like that, rather than me having a head count, an overhead that's there all the time, to bring it in on a contract basis when we need it." (Int. 6 – global head).

One of the key points in both of the above quotes is the cost. This is something that was mentioned by all of the interviewees, as part of the overall cost of the internationalisation process. The local knowledge and expertise, therefore, can be hired, and in that manner be acquired by the hotel chain. This is a point that has also been recorded under the theme of 'grafting' presented in the next section.

Apart from the above, the interviews pinpoint to another interesting source of knowledge, through relationships of a 'weak tie' nature: acquaintances and friends or business contacts. The use of these particular sources of knowledge seems to mostly take place in the beginning of the internationalisation process. All of the interviewees

mentioned relationships being very helpful for the purpose of acquisition of knowledge, both tacit and explicit. Int. 13 (SVP) is a characteristic example of this:

“Most of the development guys here in Location X at least, they were my clients when I was working as a consultant for different investment management companies. They are, some of them my friends, I have very good relationship with them and yeah we pick up the phone and we, we talk and we help each other if we can.”

The hotel chain development sector seems to be a relatively small industry, where professionals know each other, and most times are very friendly with each other. These relationships seem to extend beyond hotel chains, to other professional services, such as investment companies and consultancies, or market research businesses providing reports and feasibility studies. It is interesting to note that the particular interviewee (Int. 13), was recruited to lead the development of a European based hotel chain, while working for an investment management company. All of the interviewees stated that they have relationships throughout the development world, with which they discuss issues, seek advice, information and support:

Int. 2:	<i>“I know all of my colleagues in different companies, that we talk about these things a lot. You can definitely get advice and pick up things from friends and associates in the industry.” (Int. 2 – director).</i>
Int. 6:	<i>“it surprises me actually, particularly the hotel industry is very much like that. So they’re very supportive network and people tend to share information. I was in retail before I came into hotels and in retail the opposition, the competitors are your enemy and you don’t do anything to help, you try and slow them down or distract them or stop them, but in hotels it’s all friendly and supportive. (Int. 6 – global head).</i>
Int. 12:	<i>“it’s a small community and I think we sometimes talk to peers in other companies, we will get access to various good data and, you know, and sometimes we might help each other out with some, some information, you know, in hospitality, everybody is very hospitable and because we are in the</i>

<i>hospitality business, so it's not just the people in the hotels that are hospitable as well the people that work in corporate offices, they're all very hospitable." (Int. 12 – VP).</i>

There seems to be a sense of collegiality in the industry, that seems to go beyond normal business norms. The fact that these networks, extend to competitor hotel chains is an interesting part of the research findings that emerges. Although these networks are understood to be very active, there seems to be less contact towards the top of the hierarchy, and more contact towards the lower levels. Furthermore, the acquisition of knowledge on the top levels of the development management seems to be more tacit, while on the lower levels of the development hierarchy, more explicit. An example of this is Int. 14, who as a director of development explained that they very often exchange feasibility studies, market reports and other knowledge of an explicit nature with other colleagues in other hotel chains. Int. 10, an SVP, explained that often he is often in contact with colleagues and friends who are on the same level, to exchange ideas, catch up with what is new and upcoming in the market, and understand how the others dealt with similar issues. It was made clear however, by all interviewees, that when they communicate with competitors, they are making sure that confidential details are not discussed. The tacit knowledge that is acquired, is in the form of 'hints and tips', personal examples and scenarios, pointing each other to the right direction. The collaboration however, can sometimes extent beyond even these. Int. 6 (global head), described a scenario, through which the support can go beyond advice:

"I mean it is a big network sometimes we work with other hotel people, for example we might find piece of land for sale in, I don't know, a city, but it's too big for us, so we might find someone else to come along aside us and work with to deliver two hotels alongside each other."

The particular networks that developers use as a source of tacit knowledge acquisition, seem to be a mixture of both of social interactions as well as connections of mutual benefit. The relationships of this nature, that developers have in hotel chains, stem from

the industry itself and from by being exposed to it. They formulate from the very early years of their careers and general professional life:

Int. 8: "A lot of the people who work in development, either have worked in the past with, with or colleagues in, you know, other, with other competitors or consultants, consultants become hotel developers, hotel developers become consultants, become asset managers, so yes, in the end it's a small world. A lot of us have gone to the same school, so we have an extended network" (Int. 8 - SVP)

The interviews revealed that at least two of the interviewees on a senior vice president of development role, but on different hotel chain, had studied together at the same hotel school. Also, during the period that the interviews were being conducted, two other new senior vice presidents, were recruited from within the same consultancy, for different hotel chains. This characteristically shows how relationships can move from one sector, or social circumstance, to the other and how familiar all main players might be with each other.

Grafting

Another way of acquiring tacit knowledge, not previously held by the business, is that of recruiting experienced professionals or acquiring units. This is another theme that came across clearly through the interviews and has been titled as 'grafting', using the term as is appearing in the literature review. Int. 3 (VP), explained how her international experience is one of her professional strengths.

Int. 3: "the reality is that people change jobs. I did exactly the same, I moved from Hotel Chain X to Hotel Chain 3. And Hotel Chain X loses my experience and Hotel Chain 3 gains it. But that's my personal collateral, that's what I'm selling. That's why I get paid my salary for. I get paid my salary cause I have 24 years of international experience."

Although, Int. 4 (director) stated that there is not a lot of movement within the higher positions of the hotel chain development teams, it seems that hotel chains do target specific individuals according to their needs and according to their expansion plans:

“development is one of those fields that are very closed off. So, they rarely have openings, and unless the company is expanding to the point of needing more manpower, people rarely leave development. So, there is not so much turnover.... But again there is no set path for it, it doesn't have to be internal. Out of our team I think maybe two or three developers happen to be internal from different properties within the company. Almost everyone else is from outside, already is an established developer, hired to help with our expansion strategy”

The particular quote also shows the size and depth grafting can take in an international hotel chain. This was supported by all other interviewees, apart from those that were of a smaller sized development team (1 – 3 developers), which tend to keep a core of developers for long periods of time. At the time that the research interviewees took place, Int. 13 (director), had just been recruited by a European based hotel chain, to overlook the international expansion, to countries that Int. 13 had in-depth professional knowledge of. Int. 13 brought into the particular hotel chain, business knowledge and business network knowledge, institutional knowledge as well as internationalisation knowledge. People with useful internationalisation experience are valuable, but also rare. According to Int. 4. (director), the knowledge that is most useful when internationalising as a developer through partnerships, is contacts and networking:

“to be a successful developer you need to have the roller decks of the key stakeholders in each market. So to be a successful developer in London you would need to know all the bankers that provide financing, all the owners that are willing to invest, all the consultants that will do the underwriting for them and then it's word of mouth and referral. You could be the best developer in London, but if you moved to Paris tomorrow you have zero of that network. You may have 30 years of experience, but as a developer there you start from scratch. You might

as well be 25. So experience doesn't cover for the context, which take a while to build, which is also why developers are very market driven in a sense."

All of the interviewees agreed that the contacts, wider relationships with the development community that involves owners, developers, investors, lenders and advisors, are the most important elements in international development, and grafting is basically the means for a hotel chain, to buy its way into these.

No mechanism in place

A theme that had to be included in the findings reporting is the 'no mechanism in place'. More than half of the interviewees (10 out of 16) have said that in the hotel chains they work for, there is no formal procedure or process, through which experiential knowledge is captured. Int. 6 (global head) characteristically stated that he is not aware of a KM system in place.

Int. 6: *"I'm not sure I'm unaware, I can say in development we don't use that... I'm not aware of whether we use it or not at different levels of the organization, I don't know."*

All of the hotel chains however seem to have a system in place where a number of basic records are kept for reference purposes:

Int. 3: *"Obviously I have a record of... or the company has a record of every single project that is ever been presented to the hotel development committee so I can easily recognize those projects that I've been involved with in the past and the commercial structures behind those projects. But in terms of sort of personal leanings from each and every one of those projects, no, there is no formal records as such." (Int. 3 – VP).*

From the interviewee answers however, it is not apparent that these records allow for any internationalisation experiences and learnings of the developers to be captured in

a meaningful manner and used by the hotel chains. The interview quotes below are characteristic of the lack of a system being in place:

Int. 2:	<i>"We don't have that at all."</i>
Int. 3:	<i>"I guess it could be, but it doesn't happen in practice. I don't write specific... it happens in tiny little learnings and it isn't really something that is being recorded. I mean we are all, it's a very small industry."</i>
Int. 4:	<i>"But I don't know and I worked for quite a few of them of the brands, of the luxury brands ehm I don't know of any company that does officially record these types of things. And I think most companies don't even pay much attention to this type of thing."</i>
Int. 6:	<i>"But that's, as I said, always about people and it's not that we have a system. We've been trying to put something in place, to share data, but because everybody is always very busy, and they never really take the time to do it."</i> <i>"...the challenge with that is how fast pace this field is ehm there is always something happening and you are always juggling multiple projects at the same time, so I feel the challenge with that would be to take the extra time off to sit down and write something, whether it's a report or write some down if its salesforce ehm. I think timing of that process might be the challenge."</i>
Int. 7:	<i>"I mean truthfully, I think that all of us, at all times, could do a better job in sharing knowledge and sharing insights I mean, this happens, sadly this requires a lot of time and effort by everyone and attention to detail which when you or everyone gets carried away with their day job, which is pretty normal, and sometimes it gets forgotten that someone else will benefit from this information and that's a shame, but that's quite natural and normal I reckon."</i>
Int. 14:	<i>"No, we don't really do that, like that. It's not really a relevant form for our team. But the... like the more... the team dealing with the opening, they will track that kind of information."</i>

From the above quotes, it can be gathered that the process of capturing experiential knowledge seems to be a cumbersome task for most of the developers or something that might not be a useful thing to do. Some of reasons behind this approach and the

lack of a system in place, seem to be: the size of the team, the operational workload and the perception that a system of capturing experiential knowledge would be a burden/ additional work and also the lack of acknowledging the importance of such an activity. The latter comes into conflict with the fact that all of the interviewees have agreed on the importance of internationalisation experience and emphasises the focus on the embeddedness of experiential knowledge within the individual developer, something which seems to be used interchangeably with organisational experiential knowledge (individual level vs firm level). These also re-emphasise the issue of experiential knowledge being embedded within individuals and calls for a closer look into the ways that this might be extracted/ retrieved and assimilated across the hotel chain.

Int. 6 (director) has suggested that a system to capture experiential knowledge could potentially be another form filling exercise, which is not really necessary, since there are a lot of communication channels within the business. Again, the size of the business and workload seem to be factors that could potentially affect an effort to capture experiential knowledge.

“Well I suggest there are forms to be filled in... it’s a burden... We’re all responsive we dialog by email and we make decisions, verbally and where possible we, you know, we report that ehm by email, we are not form fillers, we don’t have the time. We have two thousand six hundred hotels... form filling in my experience with this organization is kept to a minimum.”

There are however favourable thoughts about doing something about it, as according to the interviewees, they understand the potential benefits from it, but these are not currently of a priority. Int. 6 stated that there is always experience in-house as the turnover in development, is not as high as in other sectors. This might be one of the main reasons that capturing experiential knowledge, does not appear to be a priority for most hotel chains:

Int. 6: “We can always do better, we can always improve, on capturing that knowledge. I guess because there is not so much turnover in development compared to other

fields you always have enough of that knowledge in house. It's not like you gonna wake up tomorrow and you gonna wake up to a new team of thirty new developers that never worked with a company before. So even if you get a couple of new ones, there is still enough of that structure of people in place, that have been there long enough and have that experience to share."

It is not clear however, if there is a system in place through which the in-house knowledge can be brought up to a firm level. Int. 9 (VP) stated that they hopefully will soon have a system in place through which they will be able to do that.

Int. 9: *"But I think it's important that, I think with the CRM technology that we're gonna have soon, it will help to be aware of what's going on."*

Interviewees 4 (director) and 8 (SVP) also were hopeful that they might be able to do something in the future regarding capturing experiential knowledge. They felt that it would be useful not just for the development team, but also to share that with the unit general managers and other departments in the company, that might also be able to contribute to this knowledge, providing a maybe unseen but interesting angle to the project. Interviewee 10 (global head) provided a view that the experiential knowledge is out there and the developer needs to gain it by being exposed to different projects. He explained that as the head of the team, when assigning resources, he looks at the number of deals someone has:

Int. 10: *"I don't know, I mean more could be done whether is better use of our time or not, I don't know we are all so busy and it would take a lot of time, not sure how you would measure the usability of success and the profitability of that time against parting it to other people. The best way to gain experience is to get it yourself, learn it yourself... I still think that the best way for people to learn themselves is to do more deals and to do more experiences, and for me when I look for resources, I really look into how many deals they have done, how many things they've worked on, how, you know, what really is their experience."*

Again, the practice of capturing experiential knowledge is seen as keeping large files with numberless documents that cannot equal gaining that experience personally. Int. 2 (director) felt that a system to capture experiential knowledge within the international development team would be difficult to maintain and would become 'cluttered'.

"The problem is that even like down to people put, you know, we have this debate, you know, should we have a depository somewhere that if you done a great pitch for Hotel Chain 3 Brand 1 that you could fly onto a share drive where other people can access them, we do that across within our, within Western Europe. So, you know these things, my experience of these things is that it gets really cluttered, because people keep adding stuff and they don't give it the right title and so when you go back to look at these files, there is just lots and lots of documents and it's like, not immediately apparent what they are, or what their purpose is, or what use they could have for you."

From the above quote and further comments made by some developers. It seems that the system they have in place might not be functioning, or that the particular system in use might not be appropriate for the particular type of knowledge.

The above quotes all points to a resistance to change, although they all do seem to see a benefit in capturing experiential knowledge up to a certain extent. Despite the fact that all of the interviewees appreciate the importance of experiential knowledge, the hotel chains they work for, do not seem to do much to capture it, while the management view on it is that it is a form filling exercise, unnecessary, that will put more pressure on them.

An interesting finding that relates to knowledge acquisition in general and is seen as a pre-requisite for knowledge creation and a key to the internationalisation process, is the concept of trust between the different parties involved. According to the interviewees, trust means openness, transparent procedures and impartial advice for the investors, while at the same time adhering to the strict cultural code of contact for closing deals, of each country. A characteristic quote comes from interviewee 10 (Global head), where

the importance placed on trust can be seen, as well as an emphasis on the role of genuine care, transparency and fairness within the relationship:

“there is more a case of learning as you go and yes there are certain ways in dealing with a Chinese owner, or a Japanese owner that you know, if that, you know, there are certain things that you need to do and certain things that you certainly can’t do, in order to make up or and build trust. But I think the, I think the, aside from the human and cultural side, I think, the other part, what instils the most trust in an owner is ehm (long pause) your ability to show them that you are being (long pause) that you really do care about them, you care about their projects, that you are being transparent and honest and that you, and that you can demonstrate in what you do, and that, and that you understand their interests and even if they (pause) sometimes, you know (pause) there may be a conflict between their interests and ours, but try and find the (pause) to find the best compromise rather than systematically pulling for your own personal or the company’s interests.”

All of the interviewees mentioned the word trust within the context of relationships with partners when creating or transferring knowledge. Some of the interviewees also see trust and the ability to project it and maintain it within an international partnership as a critical skill that a developer needs to have in order to be successful.

4.2.2 Storing the acquired knowledge

The means through which knowledge is stored for future use, have been defined as ‘organisational memory’ in the literature review. Hotel chains seem to use various different methods for storing the acquired knowledge, not different however to what has been described thus far. In this part, the information gathered from the interviews has been categorised into some broader themes, as they emerged during the analysis, according to their meaning and relevance.

The interviewees explained that the acquired knowledge, is in the form of electronic files, documents such as word and pdf, email, newsletters and even in paper format, magazines, newspapers, business cards and printouts. Most of the hotel chains, store the electronic information in a shared central location, usually within the intranet of the company. There are some exceptions, depending on the foreign market norms and business standards, where information is kept by the developer in charge of the particular market or region. Some of the documents are by nature in paper format, such as business cards and signed contracts, and usually kept by the person responsible for those. There are also those markets for which certain information can be only found on paper:

Int. 4: "we have a pretty hefty management system. Used to be more hard paper. Print copies in certain markets it still is. We are very fragmented. I couldn't give you an answer for every office. It will definitely be captured, but if I save it in my personal file how do you know where to look." (Int. 4 – director)

The above reference was made by the head of the development team of a hotel chain. This is something that was supported by most interviewees. As explained, there does not seem to be a centralised policy of where explicit knowledge should be stored, and knowledge might be stored on a personal file or folder, making that information inaccessible for others. Therefore, not all of the information collected by the different developers, or offices/ regions, is stored in a manner that provides open access to everyone in the team. Although interviewee 14 (director), stated that storing and having access to explicit knowledge materials from other development teams, in different regions, is not relevant for everyone, the majority of the interviewees however supported the idea of making this knowledge available to everyone, as beneficial.

In practice, storing knowledge, according to some of the interviewees, does not actually happen. This is in line with what was described in the analysis of knowledge acquisition, which again shows that the learning is not being stored, although it might be acquired, for example a de-briefing meeting at the completion of an international expansion project, without any actual records or minutes of it kept. Some of the reasons behind

the lack of storing practices for obtained knowledge, seem to be the workload of the developers, the timing of the process, the lack of a system that is accessible and user friendly, and the fact of knowledge embeddedness, within individuals and teams:

Int. 3: "so I do think we do attempt it yeah, we don't do it in a formal way, we don't have a depository where things get put, but we do, we do try to, you know to, yeah we do kinda that short of oral review." (Int. 3 – director)

Most interviewees described communicating with their development teams often and as needed, mostly verbally. Most of this knowledge and learning therefore are kept embedded within the individual developers and their teams. A partial solution to the issue of knowledge storage seems to come from computerised systems, software platforms or other specialised and tailored programs. Several of these were mentioned during the interviews: CRM databases, such as Salesforce and other customised customer relationship management programs, SharePoint, intranet folders and email. According to the interviewees, in order to store as much of the knowledge gained as possible, a combination of these solutions has to be utilised. One of the issues however that arises, based on the idea that knowledge is kept embedded within individuals, is that of accessibility and intellectual property. The fact that most hotel chains have different development teams around the world, operating from different offices, in different geographical locations and time zones, makes things even more complex. The solution to the issue of international knowledge embeddedness in individuals, seems to be the transformation of that knowledge into organisational learning and memory, through the effective transfer of it. This is something that will be examined further in the theme on the transfer of internationalisation knowledge.

4.2.3 Transfer of international knowledge in hotel chains

All interviewees emphasised that the processes to facilitate knowledge transfer and information exchange, are of a fundamental importance. This however can be challenging, especially when it comes to experiential knowledge, because of the reasons identified in the themes above. Experiential knowledge offers a lot of challenges when

it comes to transferring it, due to its embeddedness within individuals. Int. 4, explained that there is a lot of expertise in house, in the form of hotel chain lawyers, consultants, designers, etc. that a developer would go to for advice and support, for specific internationalisation projects:

Int. 4: "So you would go to your lawyer and say what is appropriate in this market in terms of a contract, and he should know. You should not necessarily know. You go to your feasibility team and you go I've never been to this market before can you pull me some benchmarks, or can you give me your high-level view do some research go to market, or whatever on how you think this hotel would stack up, from a P&L perspective. And then you go and say how much, I have this plot of land, how many keys you think I can fit in, based on your experience and where that is, with what is do I need more suites, more back of house, more restaurants. So you do have a lot of the expertise in house. And somehow it all folds together, but it's not necessarily formally captured in one system. But that's also because there is so much information. It would probably be very difficult to make sense of all of it." (Int. 4 – director).

This expertise is in house, in the form of supportive departments, networks, processes and organisational memory. According to the interviewees, each project brings something new into the business and the way they do things, updating them, transferring international knowledge continually through the established knowledge acquisition sources of the hotel chain. It has to be noted however, that the internal expertise applies to established markets, and knowledge transfer intensifies when it comes to new markets.

The interviewees described several different ways, through which internationalisation knowledge is transferred across the hotel chain structure, when it comes to the developers themselves. Some of the interviewees were not confident that knowledge transfer as such, is as effective within their organisational structures, and if it does indeed take place, to what extent it happens. The following representative quote is from the European head of a large hotel chain:

Int. 4: "It will definitely be captured, but if I save it in my personal file how do you know where to look. So it's not about it being captured but about it not being communicated or being transmitted or shared, but it is definitely captured. We could do with less records I think." (Int.4 – director).

As seen in the previous chapter, some of the hotel chains in this research, have knowledge acquisition systems and processes in place, which help capture the international learnings of the developers. These however might not be transferred across the organisation, and sit within the mechanisms and knowledge repositories, providing access mainly to the individual that stores it there and knows where to find it. The idea of having additional work to do on top of a very busy workload and an, according to the interviewees, system that is nothing more than a bureaucratic burden seems to be the issue again, with some of them explaining that they do not have the time to share, type in or do all the work that would be required to ensure their learnings are transferred. Some of them argued whether the time dedicated to transfer international knowledge would actually benefit the hotel chain:

Int. 1: "not sure how you would measure the usability of success and the profitability of that time against parting it to other people." (Int. 1 – VP).

The particular interviewee supported that there might be a benefit in transferring internationalisation knowledge across the hotel chain, but for the effort, time and energy spent on this, it would be much better for the developers to get out in the field and gain more experience than trying to obtain 'second-hand' knowledge. This again shows the importance that is placed on personal experiential knowledge in the field of hotel chain internationalisation. The majority of the interviewees stated that they prefer a more informal way of engaging with knowledge sharing. All of the interviewees mentioned sharing knowledge in an informal manner as the most common and preferable way. This communication and interaction ranges from face-to-face informal meetings that can occur anywhere, over the phone, to email or social media such as LinkedIn:

Int. 2:	<i>“someone takes the time to sit down and say let me help you out there, let me tell you this and that, that is informal and that happens quite often I would reckon.” (Int. 2 – director)</i>
Int. 8:	<i>“so it’s not formalised but there is a lot of talking and sharing and best practices and learning.” (Int. 8 – SVP).</i>
Int. 15:	<i>“but, you know, obviously there’s informal interaction going on constantly.” (Int. 15 – VP).</i>

The main reason that the interviewees prefer this way of exchanging knowledge is the flexibility, the fact that it is informal and can take place anytime, anywhere, via any media that is available and not through an, according to them, rigid system, where things are placed in folders, difficult to identify and retrieve. One of the main issues of this however, is the issue of sharing tacit knowledge between individuals, especially when these individuals are in different geographical distant locations. This distance seems to have an adverse effect in knowledge transfer:

Int. 5: “So it was easier sometimes to, you know, call each other and say: oh, I have this project, I don’t know, have you ever experienced that? Now because we are so big, first we do not know each other” (Int. 5 – director).

The interviews however uncovered ties of an informal nature as possible support mechanism, as they have the power to alleviate issues such as that. Networks and relationships, according to the research, seem to play a key role in solving this issue. The findings suggest that networks and relationships, internal and external, play a crucial role in transferring international knowledge. Apart from the internal support departments identified previously, other play a role too, such as contractors (external). Partners, such as hotel owners, investors, suppliers, consultants and developers are also part of this extensive network, which can also include relationships, not necessarily formed and maintained through business partnerships.

The main type of internationalisation knowledge that is being transferred across networks and relationships is market specific knowledge. Market specific knowledge

deals with 'how to do business' in the particular target market abroad. Int. 8, stated that discussion on market specific information is something common in these networks and relationships:

Int. 8: "there are plenty of questions that you can ask about the market that would in no way would have any impact on, you know, the competitive outcome. What are the challenges with, local regulations, with getting building permits approved, what can you tell me about labour, labour unions and how they work and how strict are they, and, you know, what are the things that we need to be particularly careful of, etc." (Int. 8 – SVP).

Int. 8, clarified that the exchange of this type of knowledge takes place in a generic manner, without too many details being revealed that could potentially reveal strategically confidential information. Another element of these interactions that came up through the interview data is that, once developers pick up knowledge and useful information from their networks and relationships, they will try to evaluate and validate the accuracy of the information that has been passed through, by discussing it with and passing it over to other strong tie contacts they have in these webs. While these networks might be quite extensive, hotel chain developers seem to have some contacts which are closer to and usually limited to two or three people. These smaller 'strong tie' networks are built on mutual trust and cooperation. Overall, the hotel chain development world seems to be self-regulated in terms of professionalism and trust, as a hotel chain development career depends on networking, relationships, contact and trust:

Int. 16: "the market reputation is really about who you are as a person and how you handle that, and what you, what you do about it. So, yeah, that's a different again that's just more of how people handle stuff, question I think." (Int. 16 – VP).

Trust is one of the qualities that the interviewees identified as being the most important in transferring knowledge within these networks and relationships. It is a quality that is deemed as essential to have as a developer, by all sides, internal and external, in the

hotel chain internationalisation process. All of the interviewees expressed their empathy and friendliness towards their contacts across these networks and the understanding that they do not compete against each other on a personal level.

As mentioned earlier, partners and the 'vicarious learning' that takes place through them, are another extremely important element in the transference of international knowledge in hotel chains. Hotel chains usually collaborate with partners abroad, that have a thorough knowledge of the market, and can assist with expansion projects there. The findings suggest that institutional knowledge and market knowledge, are the main types on internationalisation knowledge that is transferred through partners. These learnings contain both explicit and tacit elements and according to the interviewees are transferred through meetings and presentations, detailed reports and feasibility studies, workshops, conferences and generally through working together with these partners.

Another way that internationalisation knowledge transfer occurs in hotel chains, is grafting. Recruiting professionals with extensive international experience is something common for hotel chains, especially when the grafting is 'targeted', aiming to support the expansion objectives of the company in particular regions. According to the findings, grafting introduces the hotel chains to new networks and relationships, as well as provides constitutional and market internationalisation knowledge. Although rare, according to literature, grafting can provide valuable internationalisation knowledge, with new expertise informing the processes, mechanisms and memory of the organisation.

In order to facilitate the transfer of internationalisation knowledge within hotel chains, from developer to developer, from supportive departments to developer (more often) and the opposite (less often) and from partners to developers and the organisation (supportive departments) in general, training, rotation, shadowing and succession planning have been identified by the interviewees, as the main ways of engaging.

As discussed in the knowledge acquisition part of this chapter, the training of a hotel chain developer is something that is not formal, it is on the job and depends a lot on the

motivation and enquiring nature of the individual. Int. 9, explained that they only offer a two-day general hotel chain training, that applies to all HQ staff:

Int. 9: "Yeah, it's really on the job to be honest. So there's a lot of (pause) there's a lot of hand holding for the first sort of six to twelve months, in terms of the transfer of knowledge and understanding." (Int. 9 – VP).

Int. 8 (SVP), explained how this 'hand holding' involves focusing on the methodology and breaking down an expansion project into its individual components for the new developers to learn. From there they can apply the methodology and experience the new learnings they obtain from it. It is therefore the skeleton of a deal that the developers learn, the technicalities of different contracts and the steps involved, which they have to enrich on their own with the cultural, political, economic specificities and other details obtained and added on as they work in the field.

The interviewees mentioned the importance of succession planning to ensure the maintenance and safekeeping of the internationalisation knowledge held by the hotel chain. Developers in hotel chains tend to have long contract notice periods, ranging from three months to six months, which allows for the hotel chain to act and facilitate the knowledge transfer. Most interviewees mentioned succession planning as an effective method of transferring knowledge, although they highlighted some of the weaknesses as well, mainly the nature of the resignation and the resistance of the departing member of the team. If the resignation is something that has been promoted by the hotel chain itself, most of the times there will be little or no knowledge transfer. If the departure is hostile, the developer might even leave straight away. The interviewees also mentioned cases where the departing developer does not let knowledge go, because they feel that this is what makes them unique, their strength and they do not want to lose it. In normal terms, hotel chains would have succession plans in place for all individuals. Int. 8, described that there is a successor for each developer in the hotel chain, ready to take over in twelve months, and that behind that successor, there are another two developers ready to take over in two years' time. During this time, the hotel chain

expects the developers to be sharing continuously information and knowledge with the successors in place.

Shadowing as seen in the succession planning is extremely important to transfer information and according to the interviewees, an excellent way of transferring experiential knowledge. As a practice, shadowing seems to be inconsistent among hotel chains for international knowledge transfer. Some of the interviewees explained that shadowing can take place as part of the training of a developer when they join the hotel chain, while others described how a developer has to follow other colleagues with their own initiative:

Int. 5 “follow your boss or someone else, another developer, to fill in any gaps.” (Int. 5 - director)

Shadowing, if not organised by the hotel chain, would depend on the interest and motivation of the developer, and the ability to build rapport and trust, in order for a knowledge transfer mechanism to be established successfully with the person that is being shadowed.

Staff rotation is another way that international knowledge transfer might occur in a hotel chain. Some of the interviewees, explained that as part of their induction, they facilitate the rotation of new developers within the departments, which includes spending time with all supporting functions, from architects and designers, to finance and legal.

Int. 2: “I rotated across the department, not so like on monthly basis but everyone in a different department sat down with me and said this is my part of my job, this is what I do, this is important and when you and I work together, I would need x, y and z from you” (Int. 2 – director).

During the rotation, the functions involved provide the developer with access to data, and cover details based on previous international experience and the processes and

policies involved in their work. At the same time, rotation helps build networks and relationships through staff members, encouraging further knowledge transfer. Rotational programs take place during induction for new developers, which means that this is a one-way transfer and that an experienced developer coming from the field, will not be able to go back and rotate through the same functions transferring the international knowledge gained. Therefore, the main type of knowledge that is being transferred to the developer through rotation is congenital knowledge.

Apart from the above means for the transfer of international knowledge, hotel chains seem to have robust reporting systems in place, regular team meetings, debriefs, development conferences with teams getting together, some of which organise international team conferences as well. As identified in the chapter on international knowledge acquisition, hotel chains use extensively IT to transfer knowledge, through databases, CRM systems such as Salesforce, their company intranets, email, SharePoint, and other online platforms that allow the storage and access of information for multiple users.

Some of the main reasons that efforts for the transfer of internationalisation knowledge in hotel chains fail, is that it has several challenges. The properties of knowledge, such as the level of tacitness and complexity complicate things and can dictate the amount, quality and type of knowledge shared. The issues of knowledge embeddedness complicate things even more, as the crucial type of international knowledge is tacit, gained in the field. The research has identified several challenges on the transfer of knowledge within hotel chains, which are analysed below.

Some of the interviewees expressed their concern over the relevance of the knowledge transferred. There is a lot of information circulating through different channels and it can be difficult for a developer to go through it all and pick the relevant pieces of knowledge.

Int. 4: "There is an overload of information, you need to pick and choose the ones that are relevant to you. Probably you don't want to overdo it. is it even relevant?"

Because the role is to develop in the UK where this would never be an issue. So me giving you a lot of information on something that is not relevant, to your market, not sure that would necessarily be a good thing.” (Int. 4 – director)

According to the literature, the internationalisation knowledge obtained in one market, might be relevant to another. Some of the interviewees explained that they would personally make sure that relevant knowledge from one market, reaches the developers of another market. In general, it seems that the way management facilitates knowledge transfer plays a role in knowledge transfer and any knowledge transfer effort seems to depend on individual initiative or managerial motivation. A characteristic quote on this comes from Int. 3, the European head of a large hotel chain development team:

“Yeah, we talk about it a lot at team meetings, or when we get together with people from various different parts of the globe or the region, we all talk about how lovely it would be to have a shared drive where we can deposit materials or we could share information, and the reality is that as we go back to our office, and we’re so absorbed in what we’re doing that we don’t do that.”

Although there seems to be a need and motivation for knowledge transfer across the organisation, even with teams in different geographical locations, the initiatives and efforts stop. The main reasons are the workload, the lack of support from the individual team members due to the need for flexibility in the way they work, and the lack of support from the leadership. All of the interviewees described the knowledge transfer process as a form filling exercise, a burden that takes time, unnecessary work that creates more work and “a lot of information tends to get lost anyway” (Int. 8 – SVP). It is evident that the image and impressions that the interviewees have on knowledge transfer, reporting systems and storing processes to facilitate it, are not positive or supportive.

Management discretion emerged as another key area, when it comes to knowledge transfer in hotel chains. Management discretion involves the decision on how it will be

done and how much of it will be transferred. In the table below are some characteristic quotes, demonstrating it:

Int. 4:	<i>“maybe a key learning would be inappropriate to share with a wider development community cause still every region has their own strategy and own guidelines. And what’s appropriate in one market, may not be appropriate in another. So some of that knowledge might not be transferable.” (Int. 4 – director).</i>
Int. 5:	<i>“Also the global SVP Global, because he is overlooking the global development, he knows about every single project, especially the tricky ones. So he will lead us and say, oh have a look, just contact this person, he can help you, he works on something very similar.”</i> <i>“company A is working with my developer in New Zealand, so I should contact my colleague in New Zealand she knows what they’re doing, what they’re negotiating. Because at the moment, from only learn through the company director who we’re working with, and he way, oh we actually have another project there and there, so we have an issue of communication, I would say, which is quite big.” (Int. 5 – director).</i>
Int. 16:	<i>“I have more visibility of what’s going on. So if I see something going on in UK and I think its relevant to Germany, I can connect the dots for people.” (Int. 16 – VP).</i>

Therefore, the manager in charge of the continental expansion projects, decides what knowledge and learning are relevant to be transferred and to what markets these would be relevant. Ultimately a lot of relationship building, networking and facilitating knowledge transfer, depends on management discretion. Taking into consideration the overall negative stance towards knowledge management systems as seen above, the support of informal communication flows between developers by the management is vital for the transfer of internationalisation knowledge.

Confidentiality is another issue that emerged through the findings. All of the interviewees mentioned the need to keep certain expansions project details confidential, because of their strategic importance:

Int. 4: "bear in mind that development work is by definition very confidential. So if you put it in a system, you need to control the access of it. Ehm so I'm not sure if that would be the best bit." (Int. 4 – director).

The need for confidentiality imposes the need for more checks and controls, in order to limit access to the particular information, therefore limiting the amounts of knowledge that can be transferred between developers, and the ability to freely retrieve it from a repository. Some of the interviewees expressed their concern and the time that it would take to look into the details of a project and decide what is relevant for which team, what is confidential and what not and what can be shared through what means. This places another challenge for the transfer of internationalisation knowledge in hotel chains.

Another possible issue on internationalisation knowledge transfer, seems to be the size of the organisation. Half of the interviewees mentioned that they do not know all of their colleagues, within the hotel chain development team, that work in other offices, because of the large size of the company. Interviewees from these larger hotel chains also mentioned less strong links in terms of communications with other offices based elsewhere. Int. 4 (director) explained how fragmented the hotel chain is and how each office based in different regions do things slightly differently when it comes to managing knowledge. This affects communications and networking between offices and limits the options to transfer international knowledge.

4.2.4 Re-application of stored knowledge in the internationalisation process

The interviewees explained that the accumulated knowledge and past experiences are more useful when expanding to new markets. They form a core, upon which they start building their strategy, looking into alternative routes or confirming the current ones, as they continue to gather intelligence:

Int. 8: "We have, you know, certain information that we've gathered from previous iterations, so different projects but same destination or same country. So, you

know, we try and we keep, we go back to the information that we created, or generated, at the time. And then there is, you know, and then we have things there we need to refresh as I mentioned about the feasibility studies, we can sometimes, we can also ask, we can also dig our own independent, you know, do some more due diligence on our own, through consultants who we pay.” (Int. 8 – SVP).

According to the interviewees, this core knowledge for particular markets is market-specific, providing the necessary information to the hotel chain, as to how to do business in the particular area of interest. This includes institutional knowledge aspects, as well as business knowledge aspects. The developers would retrieve previous market specific knowledge and use that as a basis to build upon, and add the latest information available, making it more relevant. They sometimes use previous cases and scenarios as learning tools, to try and understand how the new project fits these parameters and what conclusions can be drawn:

Int. 11: “Yeah, absolutely because we look at, you know, majority of the time we look at the previous feasibilities, so you know, what have we found in that project, how similarities to this one we’re looking at, can we draw the same conclusions, are they different, so it’s definitely very very helpful to have this kind of knowledge.” (Int. 11 – director).

A feasibility study presents a plan, of how a new hotel chain property would succeed in the particular market, including alternative options and combinations of hotel characteristics, in an effort to identify the most balanced position. Most hotel chains devise several alternative options for their new expansion projects, as some of them are bound to fail (Int. 6 – global head). The interviewees explained that feasibility studies are the best tool when looking into new projects, in current markets. When it comes to new projects, in new markets, then new feasibility studies will need to be conducted. According to the interviewees, elements of accumulated international knowledge seem to also apply to markets which might be geographically distant but have similar characteristics. Emerging markets seem to have many common characteristics, with some learnings from one, being relevant to another:

Int. 4: “And a lot of the emerging markets have similar challenges. So that’s where you get your learnings from. So, if you try to set up your first hotel in Russia, some of the key considerations might still be applicable in sub-Saharan Africa. Two very unrelated markets, but the overall consideration would still be similar... and a lot of the emerging markets would still have similar considerations despite being very different as markets in themselves.” (Int. 4 – director).

The type of knowledge that is applicable and flexible in its application, is internationalisation knowledge. This is the knowledge that informs the methodological approach and procedure that is followed by hotel chains during the internationalisation process. Internationalisation knowledge is the type of knowledge that most interviewees referred to, when discussing the possibility of re-applying accumulated knowledge. As examined in the previous sections, internationalisation knowledge tends to remain tacit and embedded within the hotel chain developers themselves as well as within the company internationalisation processes and mechanisms. According to the interviewees, the ability to draw on previous experiences from other possibly distant markets and re-applying it to new ones, is one the most important ways of utilising internationalisation knowledge:

Int. 8: “I mean there are some things that you learn, which are, that, you know, some experience which is gained, which remains transferable and relevant for other projects and in another cases it’s just having the experience of knowing what to look for and what questions to ask that is relevant, even if the answer in each case is different and the decisions that you take are maybe different, but at least just having the experience of knowing what is relevant and how it all fits into a big picture, is obviously very very important.” (Int. 8 – SVP).

All the interviewees placed a lot of value on the international experience and internationalisation knowledge that hotel chain developers are able to rely on and guide the internationalisation process successfully. Reusing internationalisation knowledge utilises all the internationalisation skills and past expansion project experiences,

bringing them together in a meaningful way. Re-using internationalisation knowledge involves the application of these skills and experience, and adapting them to the new circumstances:

Int. 3: "I think all the technical skills are completely transferable. So the architecture, the mechanical, the engineering, the design, the feasibility, you know, if you do a feasibility in London you can do a feasibility in Cape town. You know, all of the short of technical stuff is transferable. I think the bits which is really critical is, is being able to understand the cultural differences and I think where experience really helps is to say: OK, I did it this way in France, to do it really well in Germany, I would have to change this. We can transfer all the technical skills easily. The bit that makes it successful, is how in my experience to understand what adjustment one personally needs to make, to make it work culturally, and to satisfy the requirements of the people that we're working with in that new jurisdiction." (Int. 3 – VP).

Hotel chains have to look into adjusting and adapting the different hotel projects in the internationalisation process, not just in the operations, but also in the deals the developers do with their international partners and owners. Therefore, the re-application of internationalisation knowledge has to take into consideration of all stakeholders involved. This is something that was highlighted by most interviewees. The hotel chain developer, re-applying the stored internationalisation knowledge, will have to add newly acquired institutional and business knowledge, in order to make this approach successful. Int. 4, explained how the new market conditions need to be taken into consideration when re-applying internationalisation knowledge:

"but one of the learnings of bringing in an overly new brand, is if something works in country A it doesn't mean its gonna work in country B. So you need to adapt based on the local conditions, which could be land cost, development services fees, ehm... But that's a consideration of the market, it's not a brand or strategy consideration, you just need to think global and act local." (Int. 4 – director).

Other interviewees mentioned other considerations as well, such as culture and geography. One example that was used, was that the new unit opening team usually is comprised of 'expats' and company experts, but the team that will take over and run the property after the first three or six months, will be locals, or other regionally accepted nationality.

The re-application of knowledge has an impact on costs and speed. According to the interviewees, the accumulated knowledge can cut down on costs when internationalising. The hotel chain will have to do less research to gather institutional and business knowledge, up to a certain extent, as some new information will have to be acquired. More experience however will support the hotel chain to negotiate and finalise deals faster and allocate time more efficiently:

Int. 1: "I guess more experience just helps you more with at times do things more quickly by asking the right questions, by recognising pitfalls, by being able to manoeuvre around them and speed save money, I mean the quicker I get a deal done the quicker I can allocate my time to a different project. So that's a financial incentive certainly working to negotiate more quickly helps you save on legal fees, there is a lot of legal fees we spend on each of our deals, so some of them help you avoid trouble and some of them help you save money if they help you speed up the process." (Int. 1 – VP).

Multi-tier hotel chains start expanding by choosing a gateway city, a capital, or the administrative or commercial city. They would then start with a hotel chain core brand and after the first property is established, they look for a second or third property in the same market, but different brands. They would then seek to expand to secondary market within the same location. In the scenario of multi-tier hotel chains, the utilisation of stored and accumulated knowledge to internationalise as in the above example, would have a direct and immediate effect on speed and cost savings. As explained by the luxury hotel chains, this might apply to a regional level, as the strategy in the luxury sector differs. They usually open only one property in a location, after having acquired all necessary knowledge and made sure that the market is mature enough to support

such an operation successfully. According to the interviewees, the core of the expansion strategy in this case would be based on internationalisation knowledge.

4.3 Usefulness of knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains

The interviewees referred to several different types of knowledge that are useful. The data collected has been categorised into the four themes describing useful knowledge during the internationalisation process: congenital or prior knowledge, market knowledge (business knowledge & institutional knowledge) and internationalisation knowledge:

Congenital knowledge

All of the interviewees mentioned of the importance of having a strong basis of congenital knowledge, in order to complete expansion projects effectively. The strategy, the vision, the targets, the brands and all latest hotel chain updates is something that all developers pay particular attention to, as it gives them direction. All different brands (some chains have several different brands in their portfolio) have different requirements and standards and these can differ regionally. The thorough knowledge of these requirements supports the development team in making the right decisions, knowing how and what aspect need to be adapted according to local demands. All chains have similar project deal/ agreement structures, however the terms of the deals that will be signed might differ and the ability and flexibility to adjust to a new local market is something unique for each chain. Further the risk taking when working on deal terms and the flexibility and how far a developer could go with these risks, is an essential guide for all developers. All interviewees highlighted the importance of knowing and being aware of the hotel chain deal structure and risk taking and flexibility guidelines, as this is essentially where the bottom-line profit comes from. Some of the interviewees, explained that knowledge of branded hotel operations is beneficial, and knowing the way the particular chain works helps deal with knowledge requirements such as space requirements, hotel construction details, operational costs and financial requirements

and allowances for each brand as well as problem solving as per hotel chain procedures. Congenital knowledge is available to developers via the internal information knowledge acquisition sources: internal direct (meetings, reporting, best practices, succession planning, Information systems, internal networks) and internal objective knowledge.

Institutional knowledge

According to the interviewees, institutional knowledge is the knowledge needed before any decision is made towards expanding abroad, relating to a country's political, and sociocultural profile. It is essential to first ensure the success and growth of a project, through a thorough and clear understanding and view of all aspects of the wellbeing of the targeted destination:

Int. 3: "I'm looking at projects, very long-term projects right, so the financial ehm and political stability of a country is very important... let's say for example right now Istanbul. Istanbul ehm you know, with everything that has been happening there, is politically, economically very difficult market for hotels right now, you have to make an assessment and of, you know, what for how long this country be in this position, do we think it will recover if we start working on a project now and then it starts developing it, it might not 2020 2021, 2022, do we think the country will have recovered by then, so that's the analysis that you have to deal with many countries, such as Turkey, let's say Brazil the last few years it's been difficult, Morocco still has challenges, and of course lots of places in the middle east have challenges, ehm so those are the things that you need to evaluate to assess the long-term viability and success of the hotel." (int. 3 – VP).

The particular interviewee highlighted the political and economic situation of a market, as the first thing to look into during the first stages of the internationalisation process. When referring to the political situation of a market, the interviewees explained the importance of long-term government stability, security, transparency and corruption levels, as well as the openness of the policy makers towards foreign investment in the country. The economic side includes the financial stability of the market, currency

strength, and general macro-economic risks, future development and growth. Other interviewees mentioned further details, such as legislation, cost structure: land costs and labour costs (minimum wage), and the 'ease of doing business' in the country:

Int. 2: "It is always helpful, if you worked in a specific country in the past, because you learn a lot, about the culture, the negotiating style, planning regulations, as a lot of the projects we work on are newly built developments, so you have a little bit better understanding of the timing, we also need to understand funding, employment laws, regulations in different countries, so it helps to have worked in another country before." (Int. 2 – director).

Developers do receive an initial training by the hotel chain, in the culture, values and negotiating style of a market, however they are expected to expand their knowledge and understanding, in order to succeed in closing deals. They develop a thorough understanding of the culture or a market before dealing with it, through training, books, colleagues and networks as well as personal visits to the country. According to Int. 4 (director), negotiation style can be very culturally driven, and it is extremely important to have that basic empathy and sensitivity that will support the developer in closing a deal.

The operational side of the business is another aspect that need to be carefully examined under the light of institutional knowledge. Understanding the local market and its cultural norms is as essential as everything else, in order to be able to successfully deliver the particular brand to the particular market. An example that was mentioned was that the acceptable size of a hotel room for a particular market such as the USA, would be very different to that of an Asian country such as Japan. Another example that of an operational nature is the geography of a market and the importance of ensuring that the location is not affected by natural disasters, is something very common in certain parts of the world, such as the USA (Int. 1 – VP).

Business knowledge

As hotel chains target new markets, they desperately need up-to-date and accurate local information which will ensure the successful planning and launching of the expansion project. Some of the interviewees explained that sometimes the market works in ways beyond the developer's control. This information is not always as easy to find, especially when hotel chains require in-depth projections, knowledge of local peculiarities in the way the market acts and to penetrate local networks and build new relationships. Most of these issues can be resolved with the support of local partner:

Int. 13: "when you go to a new market everyone is a bit reluctant. We don't have experts in those markets, we need to prepare a business plan and you're a bit blind. So, you need to really get information, secure information from sources on those markets. So yeah, the risk is that legally speaking you don't have enough local knowledge, so you would need to be supported by local lawyers and then when you run your projections, your business plan, you're not so sure, so certain when you're projecting ADRs, occupancy rates, these kind of things, you are not so certain. So, there is some risks that can be solved not solved, but it will be limited if you if you are supported by a local consultant." (Int. 13 – SVP).

ADR (Average Daily Rate), Occupancy rates, RevPAR (Revenue Per Available Room) and GOPPAR (Gross Operating Profit Per Available Room) are the main hotel performance metrics that were mentioned by the interviewees, that are adequate for providing an understanding of how the market is performing. The local partners can be hotel owners or other investors or brokers, lawyers, consultants, bankers, architects, independent financial advisers, local officials, working independently, or in teams, through development companies that provide complete solutions to hotel chains. The importance of knowing the local characteristics of a market and its peculiarities, has also grown to become something that hotel chains need to take into consideration when expanding, in an effort to provide a unique service to its guests:

Int. 9: "gone are the days when people wanted to wake up in London, or Rome, or Chicago and or Buenos Aries, and feel that they were in a consistent hotel room. I think people these days, are far more educated, they more worldly wise and

better travelled and I think when they travel, they want to experience more and more of the local culture. So that producing an opportunity for us I think, within the designs of our hotels consists, the entire brand estate is being more reflective of local design and local culture, in order to create a more authentic look and experience for our guest when they travel.” (Int. 9 – VP).

Having a local partner resolves the issue of uncertainty and provides a unique market insight that will support the smooth integration of the hotel unit within the particular business area. In hotel chain development, trust is extremely important, and the language and local customs do have an impact on doing business and closing deals in a country. Again, according to the interviewees, a local partner would act as an intermediate connecting the two sides (Int. 4). In some parts of the world, ‘doing business locally is all about who you know’ (Int. 5). Apart from this, hotel chains are particularly interested in finding out everything about current competition in the market of interest, as well as what other competitor projects might be in the pipeline for the next few years:

Int.3: “obviously we need an in-depth knowledge of the existing hotel stock in the market, the performance of that interesting hotel stock, we need to be able to look at things like what percentage of suites compared to standard rooms do we need, is there a big demand for meeting rooms, what food and beverage facilities could the market absorb.” (Int. 3 – VP).

Observing competition can provide a good picture of how a particular market is performing, as well as an overview of the profile of the guest and what the service requirements are. This competitor analysis can further provide a view of the gaps in the market and where the expanding hotel chain might be able to establish its services and with which brand:

Int. 6: “we look very heavily at the competitors, so we start with what are the customers’ needs and demands that we try to satisfy, what are the customers’ needs and wants that we’re trying to satisfy, so who are the customers, what is

it that they're looking for, what are they prepared to pay, who else in the market place is providing some of those services at the moment, and then we look for is there a gap where we think that we can adapt our proposition and put it into the market place and create a meaningful profit." (Int. 6 – global head).

Demographics therefore as part of the business knowledge of a particular location are necessary, in order to understand the guest needs. The interviewees mentioned examples from religious factors, such as kosher and sharia compliant guests, to income-based segmentation, in order to establish the requirements and capabilities of the target groups and understand if a new project will be able to be supported by these guests. Similarly, this applies to staffing and finding the right people among the local population to hire. The level of education as well as the attitude towards hospitality and professionalism, are assessed locally and a decision is made on recruitment. Int. 4 (director), explained how they used a European opening team for one of their properties in Uganda and then handed over the management to a team of management staff from Kenya, which, according to her, culturally are more compatible and can also support professionally the needs of the business.

Other interviewees highlighted the importance of being aware of figures such as tourism growth in the particular market, the growth of alternative types of travel and tourism, conference travel and religious tourism. Some mentioned of the importance of information such as the closure or relocation of a large business in the region, such as a factory, which might impact movement in the market, as well as airline plans and the reliability of flights locally, as well as other transportation means.

Business knowledge is particularly important for luxury hotel chains, as they have to carefully analyse the markets and identify whether they can support luxury brands. According to the interviewees representing luxury hotel brands, they are also never the first to enter a brand-new market, as it would be too much of a risk. They would first observe other new hotel chain unit openings, usually three- and four-star level properties, and obtain business knowledge, which includes the reaction of the market, the profile of the guests and assess whether it can evolve to a luxury level:

Int. 1: "Luxury brand is never the first, International luxury brand and go into a country. Countries evolve and mature and get welfare and get more sophisticated and a country like that, you know... just like the Chinese, luxury brands are absolutely going into China but not everywhere yet, there are many markets that are just not ready, people aren't willing to pay for that kind of luxuries, you know, it's about the evolution of what people are willing to pay for and it starts with, you know, consumer good and things they can show off to their friends and flashy cars and clothes and jewellery, and handbags, and then its only later that people start paying for experiences, so the luxury brands are never the first to enter these types of markets and it is not because we want to see what other brands learn, it is just that we want to see some evidence that we can earn enough money in those countries before we go in and be confident that our brands will be successful." (Int. 1 – VP).

Until a market matures and prepares for luxury brands, hotel chains aim to expand further within the markets they currently operate in and strengthen their presence.

Internationalisation knowledge

The interviewees explained that the experience, gained from internationalising into a foreign country, supports them in further foreign projects, through having a flexible methodology or framework, able to be applied to any given market. This methodology always improves through the accumulation and integration of internationalisation experience.

Int. 1: "if we lose a deal to somebody else, we do postmodern as to why we didn't get it, why did someone else wanted the deal, so there is lots of analysis. Less cultural related than just factual about projects. But yes, we do learn something whether is positive or negative that can be applied as a learning to the next project you do, so experience counts for a lot in our industry." (Int. 1 – VP).

The learning that takes place through one international assignment, no matter what the outcome is, informs the procedures and decision-making mechanisms at the hotel chain, and therefore supports the improvement of the internationalisation methodology they are using. All hotel chains have well established international development processes which improve with time, as new knowledge is acquired:

Int. 10: "Obviously experience in development is... everything in life is a plus, but I think that the best is the learning curve of every single project. For example, we have had a huge learning curve to enter a country, which we have tried to learn from and from there we are trying to be more profitable when we go to a place." (Int. 10 – global head).

All hotel chains have met different obstacles and challenges when internationalising. They drew learnings out of these experiences which they then were able to generalise, absorb them into their internationalising processes, thus making it more effective and profitable. Int. 10, as an example referred to a project in the Middle East, which was not completed on time, due to the company underestimating the cultural differences and running into unexpected costs. As a result, they decided to implement further risk analyses and closely observe a market's culture which strengthened their internationalisation methodology.

Hotel chains of a smaller size tend to use local partners in the form of investors, which reduces the risk for them as well as provides them with local expertise and useful internationalisation experience. Int. 11 (director), explained that they do not have a legal team and as many supporting departments. Instead, they tend to hire them, and they would also seek internationalisation knowledge via grafting, for particular targeted markets, for which they have no knowledge of. One of the points that emerged through the data, when it comes to grafting and internationalisation knowledge, is that through this way, hotel chains gain valuable internationalisation knowledge as well as knowledge of the competitors' methodology and insights into their know-how:

Int. 1: "It's hard, look when you work for a company for a number of years and I know the kind of deal structure they are doing, I know the terms they are signing and I have that knowledge, of course I'm gonna know that knowledge when I work for another brand and I'm competing with that organisation, so you know we all know a lot about each other you can't prevent that knowledge from spreading."
(Int. 1 – VP).

Although departing developers cannot take any documentation with them or files of any kind, as hotel chains have extremely strict policies when it comes to this, as well as confidentiality contracts, protecting the intellectual property of the company, they do take the experiential internationalisation knowledge embedded within them. This knowledge can then be transferred to the next hotel chain they will work for.

The usefulness of internationalisation knowledge also depends on the mode of entry chosen by the hotel chain. Those hotel chains that work exclusively with local partners and franchise agreements seem to be less concerned with obtaining internationalisation knowledge, while those with FDI models seem to extremely value internationalisation knowledge. It is suggested therefore that the more involved hotel chains are, in terms of capital and resources, into a foreign market, the higher the need for internationalisation knowledge. Int. 12 (VP), also made a further distinction between brand developers and real estate developers, stating that the real estate developing requires a more intense focus on gaining internationalisation knowledge, because of the complex agreements and risks involved.

As identified earlier in the present work, in the chapter on the importance of experiential knowledge, there was a direct reference to cost savings and speed. when it comes to accumulated internationalisation experience. The interviewees supported that these savings will be in form of legal fees and the fact that if an international project gets completed faster, the developer will be able to focus on completing other projects too.

The usefulness of internationalisation knowledge applies to an operational level as well, as when hotel chains internationalise, several operational issues might come up. Although a hotel operations team will take over from the developer a few months or even a year, prior to the property opening, the developer might have to get involved or answer questions during the planning stage:

Int. 4: “Operationally, if the owner has an issue with the operations and he calls you and you don’t understand what he is talking about, it’s not helpful to manage that relationship.” (Int. 4 – director).

When the hotel property is being planned, constructed, refurbished or changing brands, a developer might have to provide advice and answer questions on designs, plans, spaces and sizes requirements. In general, all of the interviewees agreed that operational knowledge, will make the management of the particular relationship easier and will help build trust between the two sides. The operational experience during the internationalisation process, can provide the hotel chain with insights on the actual brand and service that is being sold, which will inform the methodology used, making it available to use in other markets for future projects. All of the interviewees highlighted the transferability of internationalisation knowledge to other markets and other projects. It is possible to apply the same methodology, while adding the necessary institutional and market knowledge elements to it. Int. 6 (global head), also mentioned applying the internationalisation knowledge gained through the company’s hotel chain to target markets, for their food and beverage outlets (non-hotel related/ different brand) as well. This is something that other interviewees claimed as well, for other service industries, such as retail and real estate.

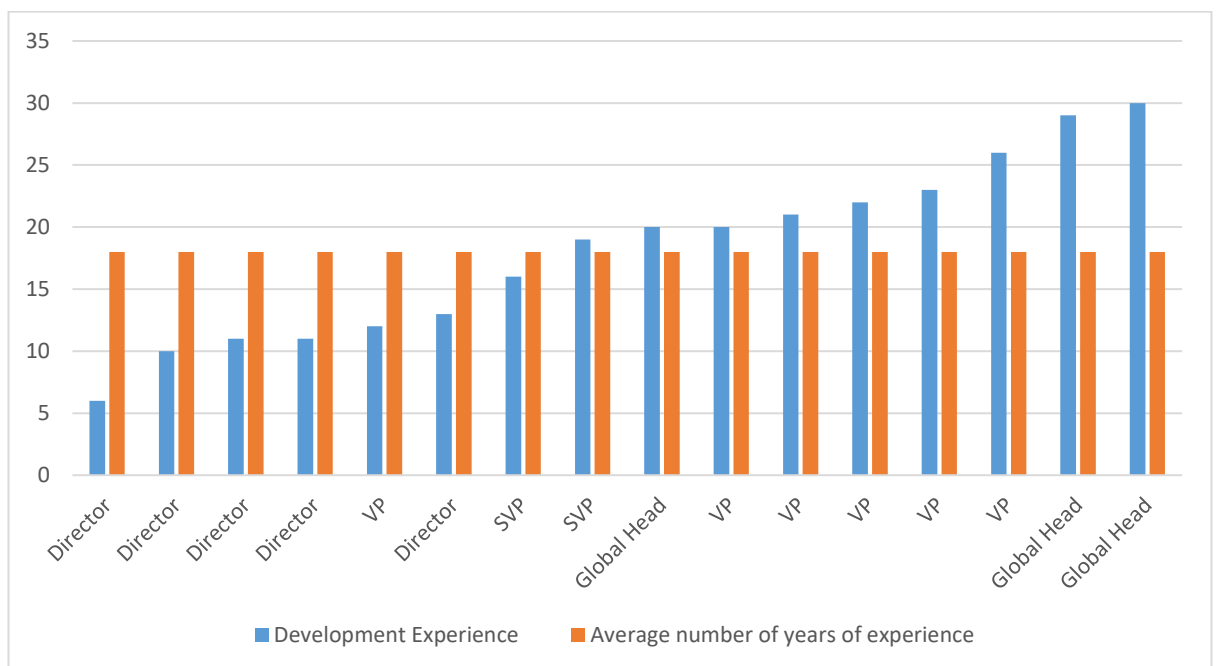
4.4 Importance of experiential knowledge

Although the analysis of the findings approaches EK from an organisational perspective, the importance of the individual developer has come across strongly through the findings of the present research.

Examining the interviewees and their personal experience gained within international development, can provide some insights (see figure 4.7 below). Their overall average experience within hotel development is 18 years, with 30 years being the highest number of years and 6 the lowest. It is interesting to note that the average number of years of experience amongst directors of international development was 10, while for VPs and SVPs 20. Global heads of international development had the highest number of years of experience amongst them with an average of 26 years.

All of the interviewees were found to have considerable experience in international business. Int. 5 was the developer with the least international experience (5 years), while Int. 6 was the developer with the most international experience (29 years). The average number of years of international experience between the interviewees was 18 years. The term international business experience is used for any work experience that involved expansion across national boundaries, in different sectors, ranging from hotel chains, to real estate and international business consulting. Therefore, the industry seems to be consistent in terms of how many years of development experience each role should carry.

Figure 4.7: Comparison of participant average number of years of international development experience and their individual development experience



Source: compiled with interview data

In the opening statements of the interviewees, the importance of personal EK was highlighted by most interviewees, as seen below:

Int. 1:	<i>“for sure important”, “absolutely important”, “much more important than anything you get from a book”, “Absolutely important”</i>
Int. 2:	<i>“definitely”, “Oh hugely, absolutely”</i>
Int. 3:	<i>“Yes is the answer”, “Huge. Absolutely huge”, “I think experience is huge”</i>
Int. 6:	<i>“helps an awful lot if you have experience in international expansion”</i>
Int. 8:	<i>“Yes, there is no question”, “obviously very very important”</i>
Int. 9:	<i>“Previous experience I think is essential”</i>
Int. 10:	<i>“yes for sure”, “it is critical”</i>
Int. 11:	<i>“Absolutely important”</i>
Int. 15:	<i>“Absolutely. Without a doubt”, “it is critical”.</i>
Int. 16:	<i>“I think It’s really valuable”</i>

All of the interviewees have agreed on the importance of EK within the internationalisation process of a hotel chain. The interviewees that are not quoted above have described the importance of EK using examples, which are analysed in the other sections below. Two of the interviewees believed, that the importance of EK, within the hotel chain internationalisation, depends on the individual level of responsibility within the development team structure. According to their opinion, the higher the level of responsibility, the higher the need for EK.

Int. 16: “I think at one level you need people with experience, that’s for sure, but the other level you need ehm, you can, you can mix up, right?... So (pause), you need, if you build a team you need a mix of talent and capability really, the key thing I’d say.” (Int. 16 – VP).

The particular interviewee (Int. 16) expressed the opinion that the importance of EK depends on the structure and the hierarchical level of the hotel chain development team. It is interesting to note that Int. 16 has an international finance background and has recently taken a head role within the European development team of a large hotel

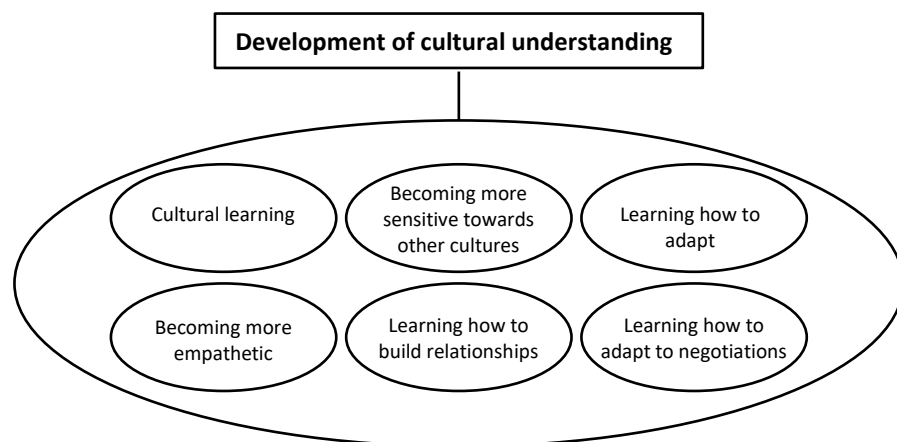
chain, for the first time. It is also important to note that interviewees from smaller development teams (1 – 3 team members) have stated that if they were recruiting for a new developer, they would look for candidates with a lot of experience, independently of the position. As has been noted by Int. 3:

“I don’t have the luxury of being able to train somebody up from scratch” (Int. 3 – VP).

Smaller hotel chains therefore do not seem to have the capacity to allow individuals within their development teams to learn through exposure in the field but expect a certain level of internationalisation experience and related understanding beforehand.

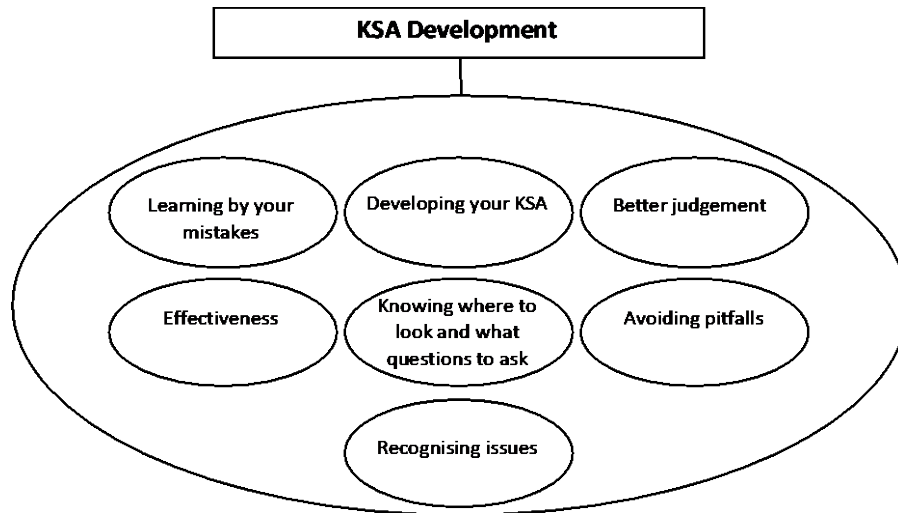
In an effort to categorise the topics of interest that emerge within the particular theme of the importance of EK, the interviewee quotes that were been identified, were placed into some broader themes, according to their meaning and relevance.

The points that were related to culture, and a cultural understanding context, such as ‘cultural learning’, ‘becoming more sensitive towards other cultures’, ‘learning how to adapt’, ‘becoming more empathetic’, ‘learning how to build relationships’ and ‘learning how to adapt to negotiations’, were grouped under the title of ‘Development of cultural understanding’.

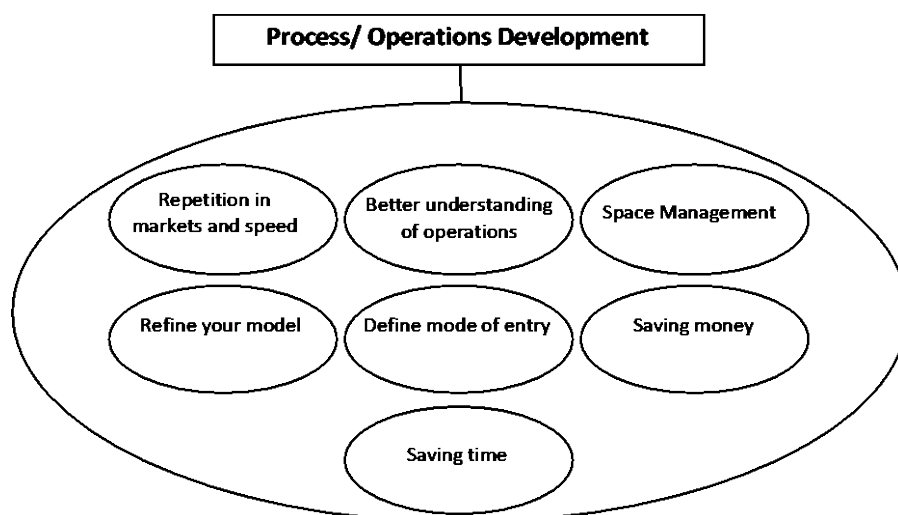


The quotes that were related to the development of the knowledge, skills and abilities of the developer, such as: ‘learning by your mistakes’, ‘developing your KSA’, ‘better

judgement', 'effectiveness', 'knowing where to look and what questions to ask', 'avoiding pitfalls', 'recognising issues', were grouped under the title of 'KSA development'. It is interesting to note that the term KSA refers to the individual level, rather than the firm level. This will be examined further, in order to understand whether and how this is transferred within the organisation, in the chapter on EK transfer.



Interview references that were related to the improvement of hotel chain processes and operations, such as: 'repetition in markets and speed', 'better understanding of operations', 'space management', 'refine your model', 'define mode of entry', 'saving money' and 'saving time', were all grouped under the title of 'Process/ Operations development'.



4.4.1 Development of cultural understanding

One of the key factors that most of the interviewees identified, highlighting the importance of EK is cultural understanding. The interviewees referred to both psychic distance and cultural distance, as they explained this issue from different angles: the developer's one and the organisational one. Some of the most characteristic interviewee quotes in terms of culture and country norms and the impact of EK are presented in the table below:

Int. 1:	<p><i>"I mean you can't go and learn how to be culturally sensitive from a book is my opinion, you have to live it and you have to gain experiences and you have to be in the field... Books are often a helpful starting point, you know going to an entirely new region, like China or Japan, that specifically customs, learn specifically how they do business, but still think the experience just a basic empathy and cultural sensitivity based on experiences is much more valuable."</i></p> <p><i>"each country is different regulations, different rules, different planning considerations, different style, different everything, we just, I mean work internationally makes you more sensitive to all of these things"</i></p> <p><i>"if you are worked in a country before, that you have more experience you are better in listening, and developing a relationship more quickly, you maybe are better by adapting to the negotiating style" (Int. 1 – VP).</i></p>
Int. 4:	<p><i>"And a lot of the emerging markets have similar challenges. So that's where you get your learnings from. So, if you try to set up your first hotel in Russia, some of the key considerations might still be applicable in sub-Saharan Africa." (Int. 4 – director).</i></p>
Int. 8:	<p><i>"Sometimes it is a case of also knowing who your partners are, where they're from, so you know, negotiating a contract with a Turkish owner has certain specificities versus a Saudi owner, versus a Chinese owner, the, you know, the experience you need to learn yourself" (Int. 8 – SVP).</i></p>

The quotes above recognise the importance of EK within the internationalisation process, through the impact that it has on the approach used by the developer, through better cultural understanding. Int. 1 (VP) relates exposure to foreign markets to enhanced cultural understanding, which leads to sensitivity and empathy. The enhanced KSA (Knowledge, Skills and abilities) due to this exposure and understanding, links to an enhanced culture-based negotiating style as well and the faster formation of relationships between the developers and owners. Int. 4 (director) highlights how emerging markets have similarities and that exposure to one of these markets, might lead to applicable considerations to another one. It is important to emphasise however the fact that within the same quote, the interviewee highlights the applicability of the same key considerations to completely unrelated markets (Russia and sub-Saharan Africa), something that will be examined further in the section on re-using EK. Int. 8 (SVP) emphasises the importance of EK, as something that a developer should have, in order to understand the differences between different negotiation styles, based on culture, and also the importance of being able to disseminate this knowledge within the hotel chain itself. It is interesting to note that the above quotes on the importance of EK mainly refer to gaining institutional knowledge and internationalisation knowledge.

4.4.2 Development of knowledge, skills and abilities

The importance of EK within the internationalisation process is also seen to be due to the actual learning, other than cultural, that can only occur through a general exposure to foreign markets. The term KSA refers to qualities held on an individual level (especially the skills and abilities part) as well as firm level, something also supported by KBT, through which the hotel chain is viewed as a knowledge bank. The learning can be positive or negative, and either way seems to contribute to the pool of internationalisation knowledge of the hotel chain, as well as the skills and abilities of the developers. Although observing competitors is a widely used option, it would be difficult however to observe and the skills and abilities obtained at a developer level. The quotes presented in the table below, show some of the reasons behind the perceived importance of EK, and seem to directly relate to KBT and certain stages of learning

models, such as Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, which have been analysed in the literature review:

Int. 1:	<p><i>“we do learn something whether is positive or negative that can be applied as a learning to the next project you do, so experience counts for a lot in our industry.”</i></p> <p><i>“The more experience you have, the more you are aware of pitfalls, weaknesses, and gaps in the experience of a developer, the ability to get it done” (Int. 1 – VP)</i></p>
Int. 2:	<p><i>“over the years, its shaped my understanding of what is important, what I need to mitigate and where I can add that view so... effectively make me quick to understand, quick to come up with suggestions, confident to deal with the problems, etc.” (Int. 2 – director)</i></p>
Int. 4:	<p><i>“But any (pause) anything you’ve learned by trial and error will form a decision you make in the future. So, if you wanna launch a new brand, that is not in your plan a decision six new brands in the past ten years, you would know which market segment, which markets you wanna apply it to, how big the room should be. So, all of that comes kind of in play, from previous experience.” (Int. 4 - director)</i></p>
Int. 8:	<p><i>“experience which is gained, which remains transferable and relevant for other projects and in another cases it’s just having the experience of knowing what to look for and what questions to ask that is relevant, even if the answer in each case is different and the decisions that you take are maybe different, but at least just having the experience of knowing what is relevant and how it all fits into a big picture, is obviously very very important.” (Int. 8 – SVP)</i></p>
Int. 16:	<p><i>“So, experience helps you. Helps you not to get screwed over. Helps you not to waste time with the wrong people. Ehm I think it helps you to short of, how is a good deal versus a bad deal and to make good call. So, it’s from a judgement perspective, I think it’s really really valuable.” (Int. 16 – VP)</i></p>

An important element that is revealed above, is the “learning by your mistakes”, something that can only be gained through experience and exposure in the field. According to the interviewees, the learning, positive and negative, will lead to better

judgement in the future, will develop the developer’s personal KSAs, as the experiential learnings are transferable, and will thus lead to more effective negotiations and better deals. This theme seems to refer more to the importance of EK in terms of its internationalisation knowledge aspect. Again, as mentioned above, all of the quotes can relate to the model of experiential learning theory: concrete experience, reflection, conceptualisation and doing (Kolb, 2014). Although all of the interviewees had various different levels of experience, they had all completed several different projects, and would have gone through all the different stages of the experiential learning theory, which can be seen by their quotes. Int. 3 (VP) used an interesting example from her developers’ team, in which one of the least experienced developers with a target of 600 rooms in franchise agreements per year, eased her efforts when she reached that target, despite her manager’s advice to reach twice as much. The result was that she missed her target by a significant margin: “It is more than certain something will go wrong along the way, or something will fall out. And that’s experience. And you only gain in experience over time, so, I think experience is huge”.

4.4.3 Development of processes and operations

Speed and time of the internationalisation process were two sub-themes that were grouped under them theme of ‘process/operations development’. Speed is related to time, which can be affected by the repetitive use of experiential knowledge, by being able to make the right decisions and therefore the right choices, something that a developer would not be able to do without the necessary experience. Most interviewees described the impact of experiential knowledge on speed through different examples. The main ones can be seen in the table below:

Int. 1:	<p><i>“if you are worked in a country before, that you have more experience you are better in listening, and developing a relationship more quickly, you maybe are better by adapting to the negotiating style, so that you can close a deal more quickly which saves you money in legal fees, and there is experiences get the... done more quickly I think.”</i></p> <p><i>“more experience just helps you more with at times do things more quickly by asking the right questions, by recognising pitfalls, by being able to manoeuvre</i></p>
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	<i>around them and speed save money, I mean the quicker I get a deal done the quicker I can allocate my time to a different project.” (Int. 1 – VP)</i>
Int. 6:	<i>“Whereas if you know how to run, how to get into an international market I think it helps. It helps with speed and it helps the chance of you succeeding.” (Int. 6 – global head)</i>
Int. 13:	<i>“In all the, the phases of a project, from analysing the opportunity to negotiating the lease agreement, until closing the deal, I think the speed in each phase, the more experience you have, the quicker, faster and better, things can be done.” (Int. 13 – SVP)</i>

The experience identified as useful by most of the interviewees and related to speed, seems to be related to a developers’ KSA. Some of the interviewees however mentioned other types of experiential knowledge as well, as being important, such as institutional knowledge and market knowledge.

The interviewees mentioned costs for collecting, encoding, transferring and decoding experiential knowledge, as well as costs that have to do with integrating this knowledge into the hotel chain routines:

Int. 11: “I’m able to understand better how a hotel works and the need of a hotel, also in terms of speed, the requirements and how you, you know, divide the space, the back of house, the front of house, so definitely it was a useful experience for me.”

“so yeah, things in terms of costs, also for analysing we will need less consultants, so yeah, less costs and as much as the more experience you have the less costs, yeah.” – (Int. 11 – Director)

Some of the internationalisation costs that can be identified in the above quotes are legal fees and consultancy fees as well as other project related costs, such as architectural costs. It is important to note that the interviewees placed a lot of emphasis on the savings that can be achieved by the application of previous experience in similar markets or similar projects, the speed that the developer acts, knowing where to look

and how to act when it comes to decision making, and by generically being able to do things better and faster.

Int. 6 (global head), explained the strategic implications that EK has, as well as the importance of BK, on making decisions on the mode of entry:

“And I think that experience of how you do it, how you gather consumer research, how you refine your model, how you look at which entry model you want to do, is really important.”

According to the interviewees, the choice of mode of entry, based on EK, will have an impact on operational decisions. The interviewees explained how EK supports the decisions that have to be made, through the better understanding of operations and actual run of the business. Two characteristic quotes, come from Int. 4 and Int. 11, which show how Business K., Institutional K and Internationalisation K., can have a direct impact on operations:

Int. 4:	<i>“you need to hire staffing because its lower productivity. Still very different markets, but some of the key underlining reasons are there. Or very remote areas. You might have very difficulty getting international supplies in, or if they’re hit by a really harsh winter in Siberia, or the connectivity is not great in a little market in Africa at the end of the day you need to know you need to build a bigger back of house area for storage.” (Int. 4 – director)</i>
Int. 11:	<i>“Absolutely. I think that I’m able to understand better how a hotel works and the need of a hotel, also in terms of speed, the requirements and how you, you know, divide the space, the back of house, the front of house, so definitely it was a useful experience for me.” (Int. 11 – director)</i>

Organising architectural plans, dividing the different areas of a property and considering supply routes, staffing levels as well as taking into consideration the physical environment and working around it, are some of the possible operational impacts that the accumulation of EK would have during the internationalisation effort of a hotel chain.

The importance of EK and the impact that it can have on the internationalisation process of a hotel chain, can be seen above. All of the interviewees have agreed on its' value, and they have further supported the benefits of it on the internationalisation process of their respective hotel chains, in terms of enhanced cultural understanding, the development of the knowledge, skills and abilities of the international developing team and also the development and enhancement of processes and operations. These developments seem to also link to reduced internationalisation costs (choice of appropriate mode of entry, better deal agreements/ contracts, legal fees, intelligence gathering, architectural plans), informed decision making, and enhanced operations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research that were reported in the previous chapter, in an effort to develop an understanding of the case and address the research question and objectives. The resulting themes and general case findings are interpreted and discussed in light of the conceptual framework that was presented in the literature review (figure 2.11), as well as other relevant theories and studies examined in the same chapter. The present chapter aims to exhibit how the findings of this research contribute to the sphere of knowledge and learning of hotel chains during the internationalisation process. The discussion chapter is developed in the same order that the themes were presented in, in the findings chapter.

The chapter begins with a discussion on the case findings in relation to the administrative structure of international development departments and the implications of it in the process of managing knowledge and learning during internationalisation. A discussion of the findings on the actual mechanisms for capturing tacit and explicit knowledge both internally and externally follows, as well as an analysis of the subsequent processes that involve the transfer, storage and re-use of it. The chapter continues with a consideration of the different types of knowledge available during the internationalisation process of hotel chains and their usefulness, focusing on the assessment of experiential knowledge in particular, and the implications of capturing it for the development teams and operational processes. The chapter finally discusses the role of networks in transferring knowledge and closes with the presentation of the updated conceptual framework for this study, reflecting all key findings.

5.2 The administrative structure of international development departments

The examination of the development team structures has shown a relationship between the number of properties managed and the complexity of the hotel chain organograms. The findings demonstrate how hotel chains with a portfolio that contains large numbers of international properties also have a larger breakdown of regional and sub-regional offices and development staff overlooking them, and the opposite with hotel chains with smaller portfolios. Another key finding that plays an important role in understanding the dynamics of the present case, is that according to the research participants, the regional and sub-regional offices and staff, do not have direct contact with other regional and sub-regional teams through formal hotel chain structures, and all interactions and communications between them take place on an SVP or HQ level. The implication of this is that there are less opportunities to directly share and transfer related knowledge in a formal manner, unless the hotel chain employs an internal mechanism to do so, such as reports stored in a central server that are readily and easy to access, which was not the case in the hotel chains examined. One factor that can play a decisive role in the above and that has strongly come across in the findings, is management initiative and the willingness of the heads, SVPs and VPs of international development to initiate cross-team communications and facilitate learnings exchange and knowledge transfer.

In exploring the profiles of the research participants, some inconsistencies have been found across the different hotel chains. This applies to the roles the research participants hold, and the responsibilities attached to them. The role of head of international development is equivalent to the role of SVP and also MD in other hotel chains, and although they share a lot of similar duties, in some chains some of their responsibilities are covered by the next in line hierarchical role. Smaller and medium hotel chains do not have SVP, VP or development managers within their structure, but those duties are covered by the heads of the department and development directors. The role of VP of international development in some chains has equivalent

responsibilities to the role of director of international development in some others. Although there are many similarities between the functions of the roles within international development teams, there are also differences, which are affected by mainly the country of origin and also the background of the individuals involved. The findings on the hotel chain country of ownership show a relationship between where the HQs are based and the names of the roles as well as the responsibilities attached to them.

5.3 Hotel chain internationalisation knowledge and learning mechanisms

The first objective of the present research is to understand how hotel chains, and their management development teams, capture, store, share/transfer and re-use knowledge obtained during foreign operations. As seen in the literature review (Bratianu, 2015; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Liao et al., 2010; Zahra & George, 2002), these processes relate to the ACAP a hotel chain has as well as the individual ACAP held personally by the members of the international development team and it will be discussed as part of these processes, in the following chapter.

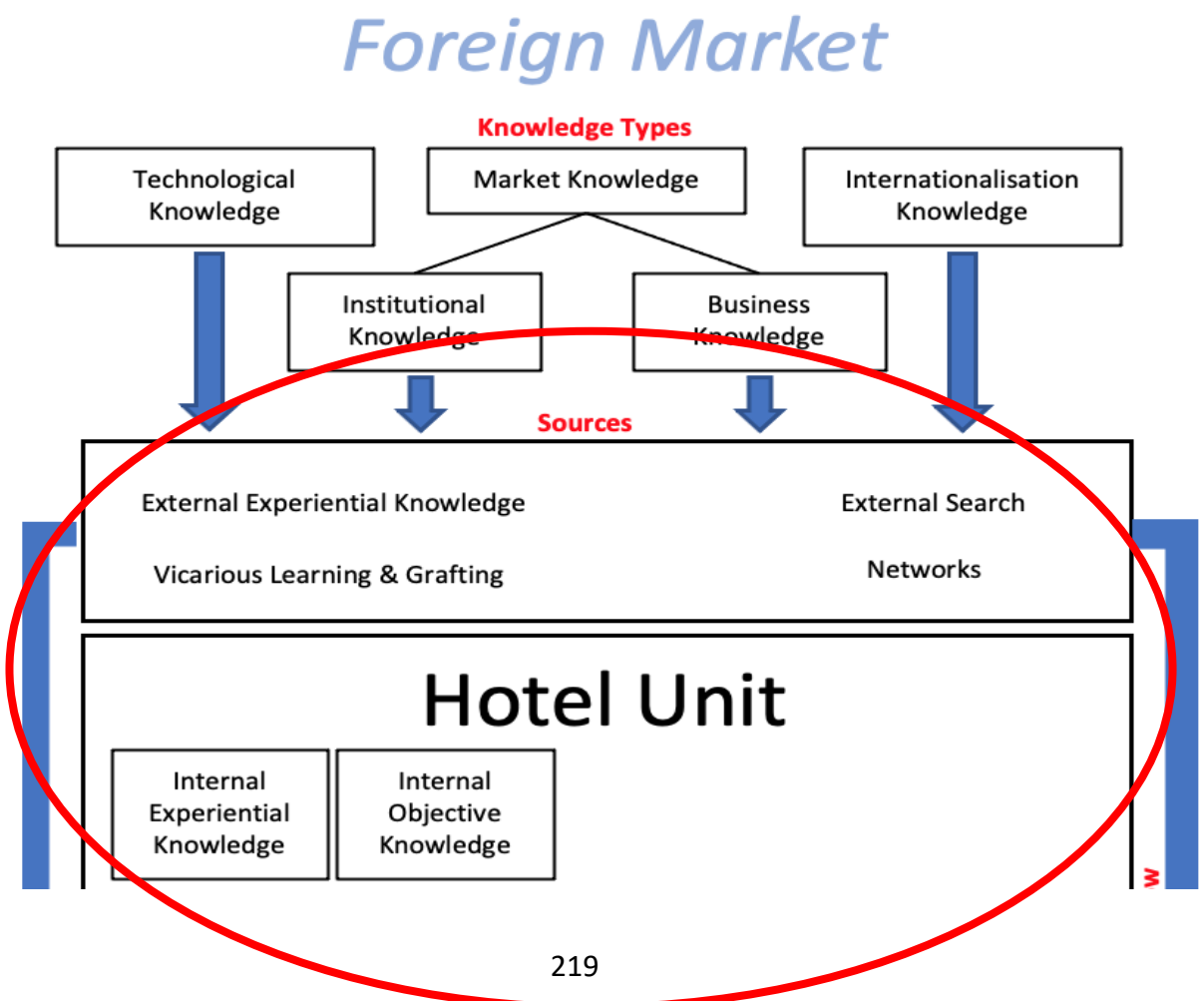
5.3.1 Knowledge acquisition

Learning and capturing knowledge when internationalising was acknowledged as an extremely valuable activity by all research participants. Although the importance of learning was something all hotel chain participants agreed on, they also acknowledged that it is not something that they explicitly do in depth. Acquiring knowledge refers not only to recording knowledge, but also the integration of it into internal process and decision-making mechanisms, as well as transforming tacit knowledge into explicit. The research established that hotel chains appreciate and work with both explicit and tacit knowledge when internationalising, although some also acknowledged that no conscious efforts to manage learning and knowledge are made in their case or it is not a priority within their line of work and therefore might not engage with any such activity. ACAP, as an organisational dynamic capability, refers to the conversion of experience into objective knowledge, by assimilating it into its processes and decision-making

mechanisms (Dau, 2015; Zahra & George, 2002) and therefore it is quite important to examine the concept of ACAP in the particular context. The findings show that hotel chains do have different capabilities when it comes to ACAP and the conversion of experience into objective knowledge. This is further discussed in the section on the acquisition of tacit knowledge.

The research findings on new knowledge acquisition sources are in line with previous research publications by Huber (1991), Fletcher and Harris (2012) and Casillas et al. (2015) (see fig. 4.6 in previous chapter). The sub-categories within these sources however are expanded and explained, within the present context of hotel chain international development. The sources are presented in the conceptual framework, within the foreign hotel unit: as internal experiential knowledge and internal objective knowledge and outside of the foreign hotel unit: as external experiential knowledge, vicarious learning and grafting as well as external search and networks (see figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Knowledge acquisition sources in the foreign market



Source: compiled by the author using interview information

5.3.1.1 Acquisition of objective knowledge

As knowledge from and familiarisation with international markets becomes of a critical importance for firms when they internationalise (Barkema et al., 1996), companies are striving to identify paths for their learning. One of these paths that the research has identified as the first step of hotel chains to understand how to proceed with their expansion projects, is explicit knowledge. As seen in the literature, explicit or objective knowledge can be obtained via standardised methods, such as market research (Petersen et al., 2003) that can be generated via internal sources and processes as well as third party services (Bengtsson, 2004; Huber, 1991). This is something that was supported by the research findings. Hotel chains access internal sources when embarking upon a new expansion project or simply scouting the market for opportunities, such as previous feasibility studies and update them or conduct new ones. The findings show that hotel chains first look internally and explore the sources available in order to develop a basic understanding of a particular part of the world. These internal sources of objective knowledge are various and range from feasibility studies, reports from previous projects and development team notes, to experiences and observations that might have been recorded and stored electronically. The internal reports from previous or current projects, completed by operatives within the development team, are considered to be one of the most important sources of internal objective information. This is because they essentially are tacit knowledge transformed into explicit and they contain to a certain extent the experiences of members of the team, notes and observations, which are invaluable and cannot be obtained through any other form of source that provides explicit knowledge. These however are not always available, as only a few hotel chains have systems of capturing these experiences in such manner and the detail and depth greatly differ, for different reasons, such as the availability of resources. The particular internal source of knowledge is discussed further in the section on the acquisition of tacit knowledge. According to Argote et al. (2003), knowledge that is obtained via inter-company relationships, such as a partner abroad, can provide better means of knowledge circulation between different geographical

bases. Despite its value, the nature of this knowledge might be complex and ambiguous (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008), but industry standards and specified formats can help alleviate this. Indeed, the research findings suggest that it is common practice to approach local partners in order to obtain feasibility studies that can provide an ‘insider’s’ perspective. This can also work the other way around, when a local partner approaches the hotel chain with a feasibility study or other market intelligence report of interest in an unsolicited manner, in the hope of generating interest. Partnerships may form between the hotel chain and local business that can help facilitate the establishment of a new hotel unit in that particular part of the world. These local businesses include local management services providers or other independent development companies, lawyers, banks, or potential business partners and investors interested in specific forms of partnership or modes of entry. There is therefore a wide range of opportunities available for hotel chains to gather intelligence of an objective nature through these channels. These services sometimes come at no cost, and the provision of information is considered to be a gesture in order to initiate the relationship. The approach to acquiring objective knowledge could be categorised as internal and within the hotel chain, if the relationship is built upon a mode of entry and therefore part of the organisation. Some of these sources however are external and could be clustered separately. Figure 2 presents the sources of objective knowledge for hotel chains based on the research findings and whether these are of an external nature, internal, or both.

Table 5.1: Sources of objective knowledge for hotel chains

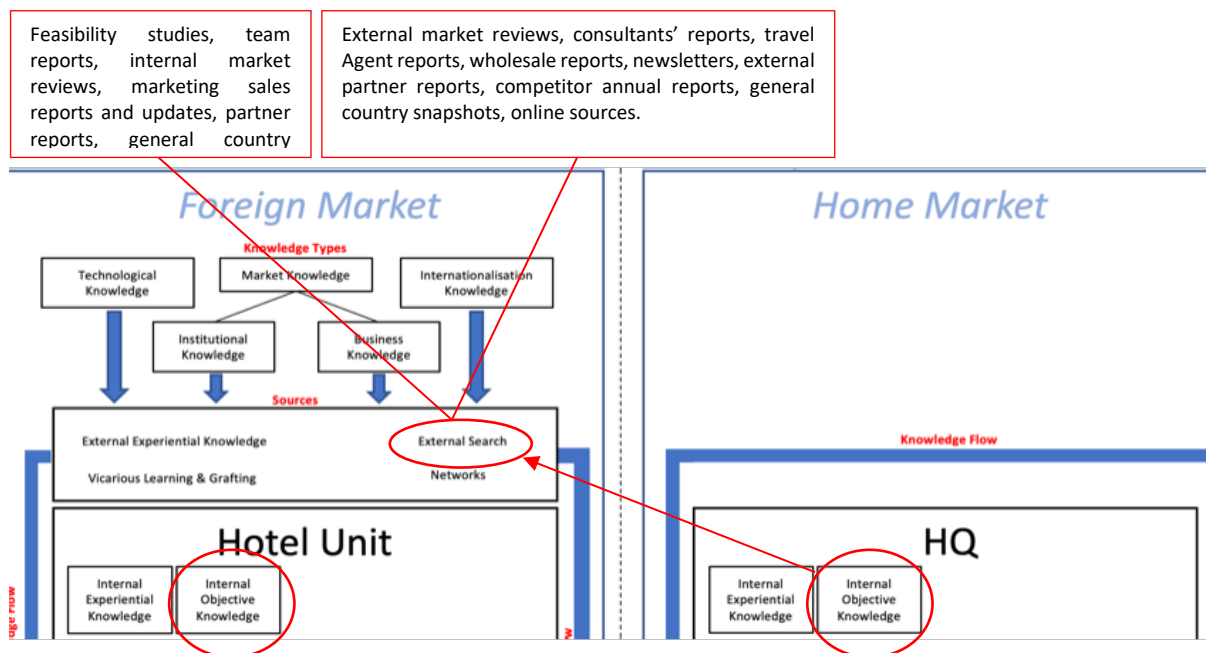
- Feasibility studies (internal)
- Development team report (internal)
- Market reviews (internal and external)
- Consultant reports (external)
- Internal marketing and sales reports and updates (Internal)
- Travel agent reports (external)
- Wholesaler reports (external)
- Newsletters (external)

- Partner reports (internal and external)
- Competitor annual reports (external)
- General country snapshots (internal and external)
- Online sources (CIA World Fact Book, etc.) (external)

Source: compiled by the author using interview information

These can also be seen as part of the conceptual framework. These are reflected in the red circles in figure 5.2 below. The hotel chain HQ will not necessarily acquire objective information from the unit, or office/ development team based abroad, but the HQ development team might acquire the information through direct external search, as well as access the stored internal knowledge.

Figure 5.2: Sources of objective knowledge for hotel chains



Source: compiled by the author using interview information

5.3.1.2 Acquisition of tacit knowledge

Internal Direct (acquisition of tacit knowledge)

Capturing experiential knowledge in particular, is one of the main challenges that hotel chains have. The findings show that direct exposure to international markets leads to direct experiential learning. This type of learning is invaluable (Forsgren, 2002) as it takes the hotel chain through all stages of the organisational learning cycle, with direct knowing, direct feedback, understanding and also the opportunity to take immediate corrective action (Brockmann & Anthony, 1998; Casillas et al., 2015; Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). The complexity of capturing tacit knowledge stems from the risks that are involved when exposed to unknown international markets and also the difficulty in transforming it into a format that can be captured and be stored in a manner that will make it available to the organisation in both an explicit and tacit manner. The knowledge will remain embedded with the member of the development team. The international market arena also works as a training ground for new members of the international development team, as the findings show that hotel chains do not have any formal standardised training as such for new developers, but instead provide them with indirect (shadowing) or direct exposures to international projects. The acquisition of tacit knowledge therefore can take place through 'controlled exposures' for new or inexperienced members of the team, and a full internationalisation activity for already experienced developers. This finding confirms and highlights the importance of experiential knowledge, due to the embeddedness and tacitness of first-hand experiences, as well as the lack of standardised training for new developers, due again to the nature of these learnings.

Hotel chains recognise the issue of the embeddedness of tacit knowledge and the complexity of extracting experiential learning and accessing it. According to Athanassiou and Nigh (2000, p. 474), "tacit knowledge is inherently non-transferable; it would become explicit once it were transformed into so that it could be transferred". The interviews revealed a number of ways that hotel chain development teams deal with this. These are:

Meetings

Hotel chain development teams use meetings in an effort to transform experiences into explicit knowledge. These can be of a formal setting or an informal one and tend to take place more frequently on a local or regional basis, while global ones or cross-regional ones are uncommon, as some developers see them as irrelevant due to the different market context. According to the literature however, although it might not be possible to use and transfer institutional knowledge to other markets, as it is market-specific, internationalisation knowledge, which was obtained at the same time, can be transferred and be re-used in different markets (Eriksson et al., 1997; Eriksson et al., 2000; Petersen et al., 2003; Zahra et al., 2000). The research also shows that the meetings that take place most often and seem to be the most effective between members of the development team, are those of an informal and ad-hoc nature and tend to have a specific focus on the knowledge that matters the most for them. Large hotel chain meetings depend on individual organisational practices, as some would have regular occurrences, such as monthly, annually or biannually and some others rarely take place, depending on managerial initiative.

Overall, hotel chains seem to be making an effort to bring the teams that are involved in hotel chain internationalisation together, for the exchange of ideas, disseminate the company strategy and bring the developers together. Some chains even involve their partners and property owners in meetings, not just to approve projects, but to also discuss issues and solutions with them. These meetings however, do not seem to have a regular occurrence and very much depend on the head of the team. There also does not seem to be a development industry standard, in terms of good practice, in sharing experiential knowledge and transforming it into objective knowledge. Usually, these meetings tend to be informal, in the sense that no minutes are kept and are used more for the exchange of information. Some decisions might be taken as a result of experiential knowledge exchange, and therefore be absorbed within the structures and routines of the hotel chain, while some other information might be lost, as there is not system as such to capture it.

Reporting

Due to the strong chains of command within hotel chains and development teams in particular, clear reporting lines exist, that ensure effective communication between the different hierarchical levels, as well as between regional teams and HQs. The findings, however, show that there are issues in acquiring the experiential knowledge available, due to the lack of mechanisms in place to capture and absorb internationalisation experiences gained in the field by developers.

Recording best practices

The research identified the recording best practices as a way of capturing tacit knowledge. This is something however that is not implemented by the majority of hotel chain international development departments. The findings also indicate that this is something that large sized hotel chains (see chapter 5.1.2) are more likely to facilitate, rather than those of a medium or small size, due their ability to utilise the resources needed.

Succession planning

One of the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data, in terms of acquiring directly internal tacit knowledge, is the transfer of it from developer to developer, as part of the hotel chain succession planning. Most of hotel chains ensure that developers work in pairs on expansion projects, in order to protect the particular activity and the relationships that have been developed between the different parties as a result of it, should one of the two depart from the business. Although hotel chains have robust mechanisms in place in the areas of succession planning, exit processes and talent management, in an effort to retain tacit knowledge within the organisation by transforming it into explicit knowledge and by transferring it as tacit to another developer, it can be difficult to capture the entirety of it, due to the embeddedness of it as well as the time restrictions. This task can become impossible to facilitate in cases of hostile departures of developers, but it is rare within the world of hotel chain development, due to the high-level of altruism, self and community control as well as professional motivation that exists within the industry. This is in line with the findings of Sharma (1997) on the motivation of professional agents.

Information systems

Knowledge management systems such as Salesforce and other company tailored information systems, or sharedrive points, are commonly used by developers and allow for international expansions projects to be documented. These systems allow reports to be stored, as well as other documents and even audio files related to international development projects. Developers can add comments and observations to these files and reports, and therefore the systems, allow for the transformation of some tacit knowledge into explicit. The research points out however that this is minimal and does not allow for wider experiential learnings to be captured, related to culture or other personal experiences. Although the purpose of these systems in place is to disseminate the knowledge that is captured, there are several limitations, such as the different degrees of access to different levels and documents for security reasons, the lack of training and time to engage with such systems as well as the heavy workloads of developers, and the management initiative in terms of making information available. The result is that electronic knowledge management systems are not used in their full potential and some opportunities to capture certain elements of tacit knowledge are lost. Despite the existence of complex systems in place, hotel chains heavily rely on their emails to trail the history and look for information, for internationalisation projects.

Internal Networks

The findings show that the interactions and exchanges of information between members of the development team are extremely valuable. This is because of their ability to facilitate the transference of knowledge amongst developers, including tacit knowledge. This is in agreement with network literature on this, which are capable of supporting the informal and form acquisition of tacit knowledge (Bratianu, 2015). These interactions and exchanges between developers, can be part of the formal and also informal structures that hotel chains have in place. These include the hierarchical structures, as well as the informal structures between employees, based on processes, routines and rules, as well as social interactions, networks and communities. This is something that has been acknowledged by the literature (Bratianu, 2015) and can have an impact of the acquisition, transfer and re-use of tacit knowledge (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Employees form powerful networks that can absorb

and hold experiential knowledge (Olivera, 2000). The findings support the idea that informal networks are most useful for the exchange of tacit knowledge. This was also seen above, within ‘meetings’ as part of the acquisition of tacit knowledge internally. These internal network exchanges take place randomly, informally and on a very high frequency, amongst members of the international development team and also other actors, across the wider parts of the organisation. Another factor that plays an important role in internal networks, is the concept of ‘ties’ and whether these are strong or weak (Hansen, 1999; Uzzi, 1999). The findings confirm the importance of both strong and also weak ties for the purpose of tacit knowledge exchange. Within hotel chains development, strong ties support the exchange of tacit knowledge, while ties of a weak nature can play an importance function too, through the exchange of explicit information and knowledge. According to Hansen (1999), strong ties, support the transfer of tacit and complex knowledge, more than codified or objective knowledge (Reagans & McEvily, 2003).

Businesses that have a people-centred approach and are more decentralised, facilitate and encourage face-to-face contact between employees, in order to promote the exchange of tacit knowledge (Desouza, 2003). This seems to be in line with what most interviewees have described as to be taking place within their hotel chains. Hotel chains with a de-centralised managerial approach have the opportunity to promote and facilitate the sharing of learnings, through informal networks, strong-ties for the transfer of tacit knowledge internally and weak-ties for the transfer of explicit knowledge locally and also across regional teams.

All of the internal sources of direct acquisition of tacit knowledge can be seen in table 5.2 and figure 5.2 below.

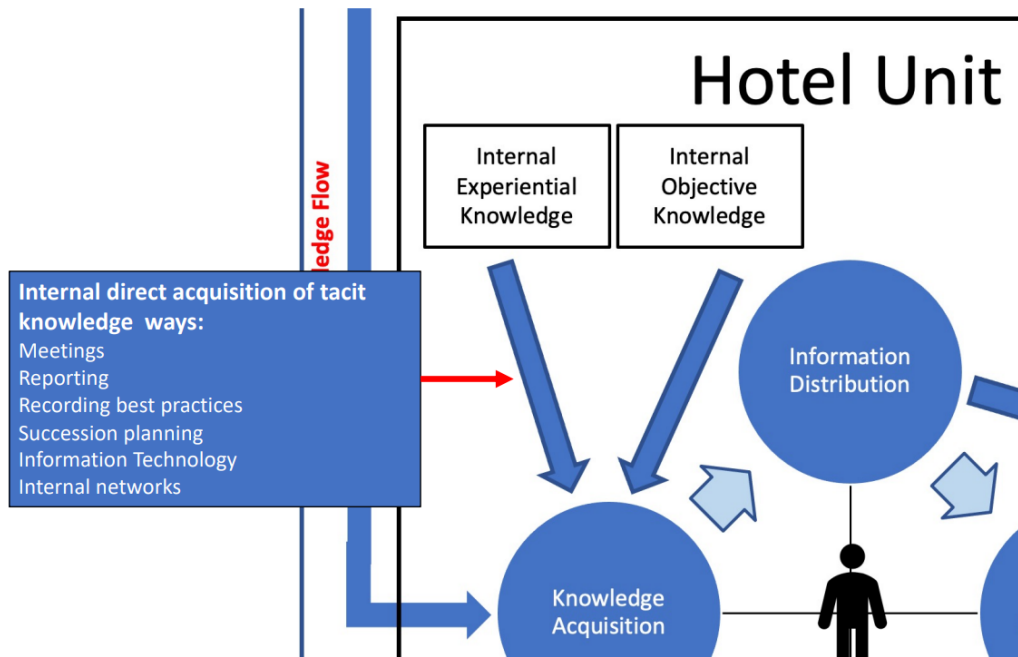
Table 5.2: Internal direct acquisition of tacit knowledge

Internal direct
Meetings
Reporting
Recording best practices

Succession planning
 Information system
 Internal networks

Source: Grouped via research data

Figure 5.3: Internal direct acquisition of tacit knowledge



Source: Author

External acquisition of tacit knowledge

Having identified and discussed the internal ways of acquiring tacit knowledge, this chapter continues with a discussion of external ways of acquiring the same. Drawing from the literature, businesses can acquire tacit knowledge externally, through vicarious sources and grafting. The findings have also identified 'weak-ties' as another powerful way of capturing tacit knowledge and will be discussed here. All three sources will be examined separately within the context of the research data.

Vicarious learning

Hotel chains utilise networks with partners in order to gather international knowledge and intelligence. The literature supports this, as an organisations' external environment offers a lot of opportunities to learn and obtain internationalisation knowledge, tacit and objective, on a much greater scale, than just relying on internal sources only (Hadley

& Wilson, 2003). The findings show that internationalising hotel chains observe others in the industry and reach out to gather intelligence as well as utilise their 'strong-tie' relationships for the same purpose. Indeed, vicarious knowledge can prove to be an invaluable source of intelligence and contains both explicit and tacit elements (Casillas et al., 2015), and therefore it is of interest for this particular research. It refers to the acquisition of international knowledge from the relationships or networks that an organisational formulates (Holm et al., 1999), including both 'strong' and 'weak' ties.

Although Hadley and Wilson (2003), support that vicarious acquisition of knowledge, mainly supports institutional knowledge, according to the interviewees, the type of international knowledge that is usually acquired in this manner, is institutional as well as market knowledge in general. This includes, cultural, governmental and other institutional norms, detailed local expertise and opportunities, local performance metrics and capabilities, consumer data and behaviour/ trends, as well as information on suppliers, competitors and other important actors (Fletcher & Harris, 2012).

Apart from partnership expansion relationships, other intermediaries, can also play an important role in helping the hotel chain acquire knowledge, tacit and explicit (Fletcher & Harris, 2012). Hotel chains do utilise their networks of local and international experts such as hoteliers, lawyers, consultants, architects and HR agents, in order to gain a better understanding of new markets. The learning that derives from these networks can extensively support the internationalisation process and lead to the choice of specific markets with particular modes of entry (Hadley & Wilson, 2003). This kind of knowledge can play an important role in the first steps of a business into a new market and can also support the formation of new networks (Johanson & Vahlne, 2003; Loane & Bell, 2006). Hotel chains are aware that gathering intelligence for a new market can have high costs. If there is local expertise that can be hired instead, they would prefer to have someone 'on the ground' rather than speculating using purchased reports and studies. Local knowledge and expertise therefore can be hired, and this is something that is also discussed in the section on 'grafting'.

Weak ties

When it comes to utilising networks, the findings have highlighted the importance of relationships of a 'weak-tie' nature. There have been many studies that emphasise the importance of 'weak ties', especially in the beginning of the internationalisation process of a business (Blomstermo et al., 2004; Loane & Bell, 2006; Ojala, 2009). Networks with competitors are referred to as 'strategic' and in the particular case horizontal, forming relationships between competitive development teams (Chetty & Wilson, 2003). The results identify relationships being an invaluable source of knowledge, of both a tacit and explicit character. These relationships extend beyond hotel chain companies and can involve other professional services within the hotel development world, such as investment companies and consultancies, as well as many others. These relationships can be of both a friendly and professional character, social and of mutual benefit, and stem from the industry itself and through being exposed to it. They can formulate during the early years of their careers and general professional life, as well as prior to that, such as hotel education settings. They are facilitated and sustained through the world of hotel development, which has a very strong sense of community, and promotes support and collegiality, even between direct competitors. These 'weak-tie' networks are very active and according to the research, tend to take place more at the lower levels of the hotel chain development hierarchy, rather than the higher levels, which are less active. This seems to be common practice across the hotel chain world. Further to this, the acquisition of knowledge through this source, tends to be of a more tacit nature within relationships at the top of the hierarchy and more explicit, in relationships at the lower parts of the hierarchy. Although the tacit knowledge that can be acquired through this channel is mainly in the form of guidance, direction and personal examples and experiences, it can sometimes go beyond these, to initiate strategic collaborations and formal partnerships. The particular approach might be able to provide certain strategic opportunities to both competing hotel chains, as according to Chetty and Wilson (2003), competitors may collaborate during the internationalisation process, in order to tackle issues that might arise. The collaboration includes the ability to leverage resources from competitors, such as financial, human resources, organisational, technical, reputation and physical, including land (Chetty & Wilson, 2003).

The 'small world' phenomenon that supports the formation of 'weak-tie' relationships are common in the business world and the rise of technology and social media seem to amplify it (Michailova & Nechayeva, 2014; Olivera, 2000). Overall, the strategic, horizontal, and also social networks, seem to play an important role in the acquisition of tacit and explicit knowledge in the process of hotel chain internationalisation. This idea is in line with the argument of knowledge embeddedness, that supports that knowledge can be embedded in relationships, teams of entire organisations and not only individuals (Petersen et al., 2003).

Grafting

The research has identified 'grafting' as another major way of acquiring tacit knowledge externally. The research has shown that using the using grafting by recruiting an experienced hotel chain developer can have an impact on the speed of knowledge acquisition during internationalising as well as on the amount and quality of that tacit knowledge. Grafting does not necessarily mean the recruitment of an experienced individual but could also mean the acquisition of a unit or even a number of units, or chain, that will result in the acquisition of the tacit knowledge that they carry. This has significant benefits, as it can be targeted for specific markets and regions and will provide the hotel chain with tacit knowledge that might have taken considerably more time to obtain, reducing thus risks and the resulting costs of this process. All these research findings are consisted with the literature on grafting, that highlights its importance in acquiring local knowledge (Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017) supports the effect on the speed of knowledge acquisition during internationalising, making the process faster (Forsgren, 2002), and the direct access that this method provides, to a large pool of experienced developers internationality, able to 'graft' their development experience into the expanding hotel chain (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Inkpen, 1996). Although, according to Fletcher and Harris (2012), it is more common for grafted experience to provide technological and market knowledge, than internationalisation knowledge, the research has shown that grafting in hotel chains results in the acquisition of institutional knowledge, business knowledge, business network knowledge, institutional knowledge as well as internationalisation knowledge. The research has highlighted that the knowledge that is most useful during the internationalisation

process through partnerships, is networking and contacts. The findings show the importance and weight that knowledge of networks and personal connections and relationships have within international development. A hotel chain developer may have several years of experience in a specific location, however moving into a new market will require building these relationships, contacts and networks with the local stakeholders from the beginning, which will take considerable time. Grafting-in a well networked and experienced developer from the new market, will provide all this knowledge and networks in an immediate manner.

No mechanism in place

Although all hotel chains have a computerised system or shared drive in place for storing internationalisation related documents electronically and have in place different methods and techniques to acquire knowledge from both internal and external sources, the research has shown that there are no formal mechanism in place, to facilitate the acquisition and capturing of the experiences of the developers and thus transform them into explicit knowledge. This seems to be the same across all hotel chains. The findings reveal that the computerised systems in place, such as Salesforce and other software used within hotel international development, do not facilitate the acquisition of developer tacit knowledge. Although the majority of the international development team members of the different hotel chains are not aware of any such activities or protocols in place, they do understand the importance and benefits of it. The efforts of hotel chains in acquiring experiential knowledge from direct or indirect sources, are limited to the ones listed above (internal: internal direct, meetings, best practices, succession planning, information system, internal network, and external: vicarious learning, weak ties and grafting) and the electronic systems in place do not seem to be adequate for such tasks. It is interesting to note, that although all developers are acknowledging the importance of capturing experiential knowledge, they do not engage with the systems in place, or do not explore new systems that could facilitate these activities, due to the lack of time, the size of their teams, operational workload and the perception that such as a task would be time-consuming and of a secondary priority. Another reason for not prioritising the implementation of systems that would capture the experiential knowledge of developers, is the very low turnover and staff movement

within the particular sector of hotel management. The developers acknowledge the embeddedness of tacit knowledge, and equate the individual international development tacit knowledge, that developers hold, with the organisational tacit knowledge pool, referring to it, as in-house experience.

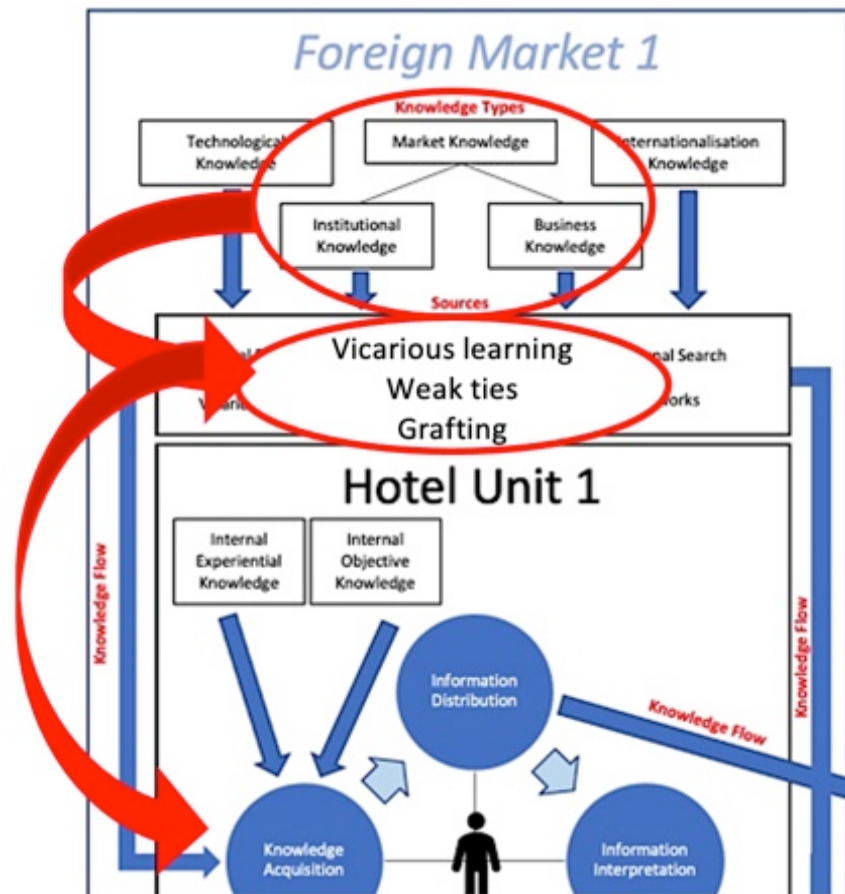
Another important finding is the view of experiential knowledge by developers as something that needs to be gained and be acquired by an individual on the field, by being exposed to internationalisation projects, rather than something that can be learned and be acquired through explicit means. This approach seems to also solve the beforementioned issue of creating additional work, and the difficulties of using a system that does not support the smart and flexible acquisition of tacit international development knowledge. This view again highlights the belief that tacit knowledge is gained by the individual and remains with the individual as a personal experience, but it is also part of the hotel chain, as part of that individual. It also supports the need for tailored and flexible computerised systems, specialised in capturing and transforming tacit knowledge into explicit.

Trust

The transfer of knowledge through some of the indirect and direct methods of tacit and explicit knowledge acquisition, can be affected by trust. Trust is recognised by hotel chain international development team members, as an extremely important prerequisite for the creation, exchange and transfer of knowledge. Trust according to the findings, relates to establishing a sense of respect, openness, fairness, impartiality and genuine care between the two parties, and it is a critical skill that developers need to have, in order to be successful. The importance of trust in the transfer of knowledge has been identified by research, highlighting as an essential quality for leaders, in order to facilitate this transfer (Bell DeTienne et al., 2004; Gagne, 2009; Von Krogh et al., 2012).

The research findings on the external acquisition of tacit knowledge can be seen at figure 5.4 below.

Figure 5.4: External acquisition of tacit knowledge



Source: Author

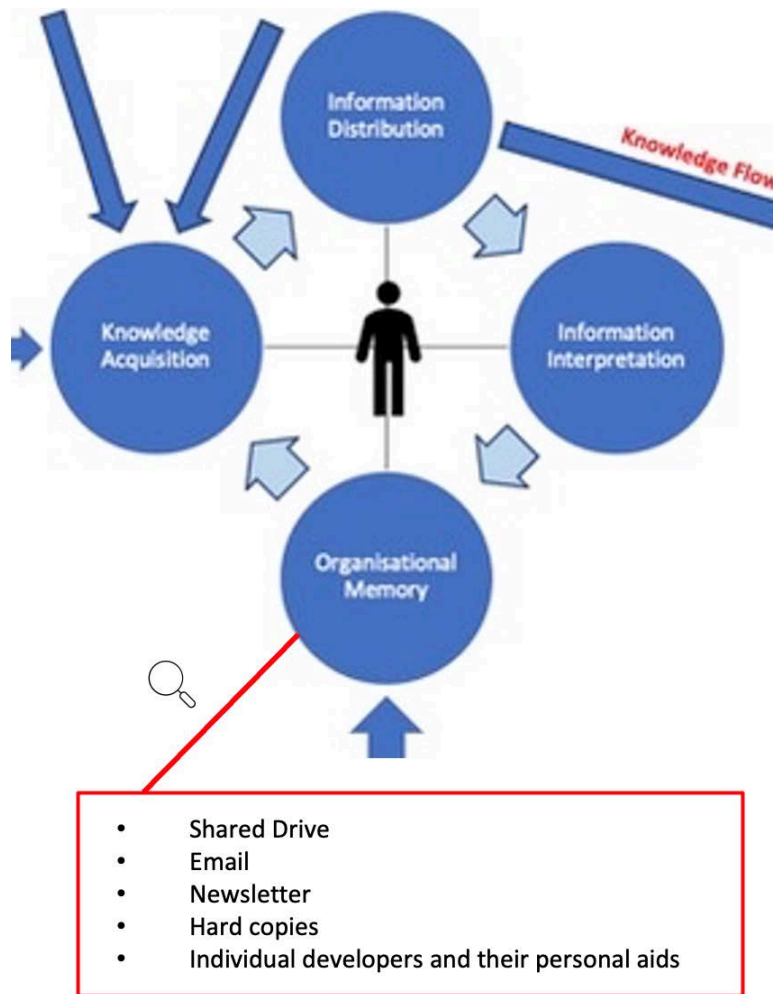
5.3.2 Storing the acquired knowledge

Hotel chains store the knowledge that they have acquired using a variety of methods. The research has shown that this is done through the use of a central electronic storage space such as a shared drive, usually based within the intranet service of the organisation. The knowledge captured can be in the form of electronic files in different formats, emails and newsletters. Sometimes, the acquired knowledge might be in the form of hard copies, paper format, such as magazines, newspapers, business cards and other printouts, such as the actual development contracts and their appendices. The type of the files (electronic or paper) in their original form, depends on the location, as in some parts of the world tend to prefer hard copies over electronic, or the opposite. It is common in some hotel chains, for the regional offices to store the acquired knowledge locally, when in paper format, for reasons of convenience. In that case, when needed,

copies would also be emailed or posted to the HQ. Similarly, it is common practice in the development world, to keep explicit knowledge that has been personally captured, stored in a local point. Without a centralised point however, that allows open access to all developers and teams, a part of this explicit knowledge remains inaccessible for a large number of developers. Some developers feel that not all explicit knowledge is useful or relevant for everyone, especially when it comes to different regions and markets. At the same time however, the majority of the developers highlighted the benefits that the sharing of explicit knowledge from anywhere would have and that it should be up to the individual developer to decide if it is useful or not. This is consistent with the literature that support that the effective storage of experiential knowledge that has been acquired by an organisation, can have a significant impact on its performance (Olivera, 2000). In order however for it to be stored, it needs to be transformed, codified and made explicit. The learning effectiveness of the business depends on the storing of the acquired knowledge (Olivera, 2000; Senge, 1990). The literature also identifies the issue of embeddedness and the different formats that tacit knowledge may be acquired in, that may make the task of transforming it into explicit a very challenging task. Peterson et al. (2003) explained that there will always be some tacit knowledge left behind, as even the most sophisticated process of codification is unable to translate all of it (Peterson et al., 2003). The criticality of knowledge embeddedness remains. Another finding that shows the difficulty of storing the acquired knowledge, is the lack of central company policy in many cases and the general lack of direction. Other issues that contribute to making this task even more difficult are the heavy work loading for developers, the time that this process may take and the lack of a system that is accessible and user friendly. Overall, storing knowledge, is not something that takes place consistently across hotel chain international development departments and the acquired knowledge is mainly stored locally and the tacit aspect of it, remains with the developer, apart from some contact information, as well as reports and contractual elements that are kept in electronic format and can be accessed by HQ as well. According to the literature, acquired knowledge remains embedded in individuals, in teams and entire organisations as a whole (Peterson et al., 2003), and individuals and the aids they use, are one of the most effective storage bins for companies (Olivera, 2000). All these can be seen together as a repository that includes all internal networks

and relationships and can store a company's knowledge (Kogut & Zander, 1992). When it comes to practice however, as seen in the literature, an individual's aids (files, documents, folders) and personal knowledge/ memory, are not really part of the organisational memory as such, as "memory system, by definition, make experiential knowledge accessible to the members of the organisation" (Olivera, 2000, p. 817). In this case study, the findings show that hotel chain developers do utilise all of these when it comes to acquiring or extracting explicit or tacit knowledge. Although not readily available, an amount of this knowledge will be accessible to them. The research has shown that members of the international development teams communicate regularly with the rest of their team, and they also utilise their networks and relationships to access knowledge of both an explicit and tacit nature and is stored within individuals. As the issue of the embeddedness of knowledge however remains the main obstacle in storing knowledge, a partial solution to this would be the utilisation of all available means to store the knowledge that has been captured, in order to acquire as much knowledge as possible. The findings show that a combination of different solutions, ranging from specialised computerised systems to intranet folders and email, could be utilised to help alleviate the issue. The findings also suggest that the geographic distance between the different regional teams, the use of different languages locally, the different formats of the acquired knowledge, security issues in terms of accessibility and intellectual property and the difference between time zones are all issues that impede the process of storing effectively the captured knowledge. The issues of the geographic distance and different time zones have also been previously identified by the literature (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Finding a solution to the issue of international knowledge embeddedness in individual developers depends on the challenge of transforming that knowledge into organisational learning and memory, and the effective transfer of it may help alleviate this. This is further discussed in the next chapter.

Figure 5.5: Hotel chain development organisational memory



Source: Author

5.3.3 Transfer of internationalisation knowledge in hotel chains

Transferring the acquired and stored knowledge is crucial to the expansion and evolution of international companies (Fletcher & Harris, 2012) and the findings are in agreement with this. As discussed above however this can be challenging, especially when it comes to tacit knowledge. This is due to its nature and the fact that it is embedded within specific individual developers, which although it has been acquired, cannot result in organisational knowledge (Sun, 2010). The literature supports that through working together, the use of common mental models, communicating and interacting however, individuals can transform their tacit knowledge, into organisational artefacts or organisational memory (Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017). It also supports

that the organisational memory in turn, informs routines and processes, through the individual member learning, actions and decision making (Almeida et al., 2022; Argote & Ingram, 2000; Crossan et al., 1999; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017). The findings support this, as hotel chains consider the 'in-house expertise' as a business knowledge asset. This 'in-house expertise' continuously grows and expands, from the engagement with every single development project, as well as all active knowledge acquisition sources, adding more knowledge and updating the way the hotel chain does things. This asset can be in the form of supportive departments, networks, processes, and organisational memory and the individual members of the development team can tap into it at any time. The findings however also show that international knowledge of both a tacit or implicit nature is not being transferred effectively, as it remains stored in personal files, drives and other aids as well as within the individuals and the elements that do get transferred are not consistent in terms of quality and quantity. A lot of times an effort is made to acquire this knowledge, but there are no efficient mechanisms to facilitate the transfer of it. The reasons behind this can range from an overwhelming number of bureaucratic processes as part of it to the lack of user-friendly systems in place. Hotel chain development management also sometimes sees these efforts as a focus on 'second-hand' international knowledge and in term of the utilisation of resources, the energy, time and effort spend could be instead concentrating on capturing more experiential knowledge in the field. The findings further suggest that ties of an informal nature can be a possible support mechanism in transferring international knowledge, as they have the power to alleviate the issues of embeddedness and the lack of systems and processes to transform tacit knowledge into explicit. This is in line with the literature as it supports that they enhance knowledge flow within an organisation. According to Hansen and Lovas (2004), social ties and relationships of an informal nature, can facilitate knowledge transfer between geographically distant locations, something that is evident in the findings. Hotel chain regional development teams are spread out in different geographical locations around the globe and away from HQs, making the transfer of international knowledge more complex. Again, the analysis of the findings has shown that networks and relationships will have a positive effect on this. The main type of internationalisation knowledge that is being transferred across networks and relationships is market specific knowledge. This is very helpful, as

according to Johanson and Vahlne (1977), market specific knowledge is the most crucial type of knowledge in the internationalisation process of hotel chains. The above discussion shows that international knowledge transfer in a hotel chain is not a straightforward or consistent process and involves the use of several different elements of the organisation's memory and internal make up that have the ability to hold international knowledge, such as the internal information sources as well as processes, networks, relationships, personal aids and experience embedded in individuals. Out of these factors, informal relationships between members of the development team as well as between them and other departments, are one of the most effective ways of transferring the captured international knowledge that exists in house. This flow of international knowledge extends however beyond the boundaries of the organisation and is facilitated not only through in-house sources, but also through external ones, such as partners ranging from hotel owners, investors, suppliers, consultants, various contractors and developers, and even competitors. Developers operate through these vast networks and relationships of both a weak and strong tie nature, with the most effective ones for transferring international knowledge, being the ones that are informal, as they allow for flexibility and the use of various methods of communication ranging from email to social media or face to face. The type of international knowledge most commonly transferred through networks and relationships is market specific knowledge. The research has shown that acquired internal international knowledge applies and relates to established markets and knowledge transfer within the hotel chain intensifies when exploring new opportunities abroad. The market knowledge that has been transferred via informal networks and relationships is usually verified by the receiving developer through formal and strong-tie contacts that exist within their network, mainly in-house. The literature identifies the importance of informal ties in transferring international market knowledge, through these networks, even between different firms (Bell & Zaheer, 2007). An interesting find of this research is that although these networks can be very large, hotel chain developers establish their own personal smaller networks within them, with two or three other people that could be from different brands or even competitive organisations and work more closely with them. These smaller 'strong tie' relationships and networks are built on mutual trust, respect and collaboration. These elements seem to stem from an overall culture that exists

within the world of the international hotel chain development, that is self-regulated and operates on the principles of professionalism, reputation, trust, pride in their craft and also empathy, friendliness towards all sides and the understanding that they do not compete with each other on a personal level. Trust has been identified as the most important factor in transferring knowledge within these networks and relationships, and also an essential quality to have as a hotel chain developer and instil in all internationalisation interactions.

As mentioned above, another significant element in the transference of international knowledge in hotel chains, is international knowledge obtained through partners, as part of 'vicarious learning'. Partnering to expand abroad is very common approach to hotel chain internationalisation. These partners do not only include management development companies or hotel owners and might involve specific modes of entry, but also bankers, consultants, legal services, suppliers and many other businesses or individuals that work within the world of international development. Hotel chains taking advantage of the experience and knowledge of local markets, collaborate with partners in order to gain a better understanding and also support in their internationalisation endeavours. The internationalisation knowledge that can be transferred through working with partners abroad is mainly institutional and market knowledge and be of both an explicit and tacit nature. The transfer take place through the day-to-day work with these partners, and also through reports, meetings, presentations, feasibility studies, workshops and conferences. It is also important to mention that in some cases, explicit knowledge can be transferred between partners and hotel chains in an unsolicited manner. This is something that happens when a party or an individual aim to initiate a relationship with a hotel chain or stir interest over a specific project.

Internationalisation knowledge transfer also takes place through 'grafting'. When hotel chains require local expertise, very often seek to recruit a development professional with extensive international experience or the required local knowledge to assist with specific international projects. Alongside the transference of internationalisation market and institutional knowledge, these professionals also transfer their personal local networks and relationships which can be invaluable for hotel chains expanding

there. Grafted professionals can also develop the established hotel chains internationalisation processes, mechanisms and organisational memory through the transference of their internationalisation knowledge.

Hotel chains have different processes in to support the Internationalisation knowledge transfer within their structures. There are transfer flows between the different members of the development teams, locally and also regionally, between supportive departments and developers and also between partners and the organisation or individual developers. The amount and quality of knowledge circulating through these flows may vary, depending on the nature of the connection. For example, the transfer of knowledge from supportive departments such as accounts, towards members of the development team will be higher in frequency, rather than the opposite. Hotel chains utilise different methods for supporting the transfer of internationalisation knowledge, with the main ones being training, rotation, shadowing and succession planning. As international development as a role is not something that can be learned through means of explicit knowledge and developers need to be exposed to different international projects, which very often are broken down into parts, so that the technicalities can be understood better and in detail. The purpose of this is for the developer to understand the logistics and methodology followed so that they can apply the same internationalisation knowledge to new projects, by adding the context through institutional and market specific knowledge, which they will obtain in the field. Training therefore is a way that allows the transfer of internationalisation knowledge to the developer. Further to this, hotel chains utilise succession planning, to safeguard the knowledge obtained by individual developers ensuring that it stays in-house, by imparting it to another person. This differs from hotel chain to hotel chain, due to their size and resources, but normally there would be succession plans for every single member of the development team. The aim of these plans in place is to have someone filling in the vacant position successfully within twelve months from departure. The same would apply to the new member of the development team that took over, but with more time needed to prepare another successor, ideally two years. The long contract termination notice periods are part of this safekeeping and can range from three to six months. During that time, hotel chains facilitate the transfer of all knowledge

related to international development to another developer. Although the methods discussed earlier in this chapter apply to this scenarios, cases of succession are much more intense, and the transfer of knowledge occurs in a faster and more methodical manner. Although succession planning is an effective way of transferring a fair amount of knowledge related to international development projects over to another developer, there are some weaknesses to it as well. There are cases that succession planning will be impossible to facilitate. These cases could involve a resignation that has been promoted by the hotel chain itself, or hostile departures which mean the contract ends immediately. Further to the challenges that the transfer of knowledge may pose and have been previously discussed, the departing developers might also not be willing to impart their knowledge and learnings in their entirety as they have worked very hard to gain them and see them as their own personal strength and advantage. The research findings have also highlighted shadowing as an important way that international development knowledge may be transferred. Although shadowing can be part of succession planning and also part of training that have both been discuss above, the findings identify it as the most important manner in which experiential knowledge may be transferred between members of the development team.

Rotating staff within different departments, including international development, is another way of transferring knowledge related to international projects. Although rotating staff has a lot in common with shadowing someone and training, it has been identified as another important way through which knowledge transfer may occur. When it comes to the department of international development of hotel chains, staff rotation includes exposure to the different departments that provide support to international development, such as global operations, the legal department, design and architecture departments, finance department and others. While knowledge of both an explicit and tacit nature is transferred through exposure to and engagement with these departments, the member of the international development team networks and builds relationships with members of the supportive departments. This is a one-way flow transfer of knowledge and usually is done when a new developer joins the development team of a hotel chain as part of an induction. The internationalisation knowledge therefore that is being transferred, is mainly congenital, although it involves other types

as well that have been integrated within organisational systems and processes. The findings on this are consistent with the literature which identifies congenital knowledge and interorganisational learning in general as very influential as they both support the transfer of experiential knowledge (Bruneel et al., 2010).

Apart from the ways that internationalisation knowledge can be transferred through and are discussed above, hotel chains are making an effort to facilitate this through robust reporting systems, regular team meetings, briefings and debriefs at the end of international projects, conferences for the development teams, locally and globally. Other ways of achieving this involve the use computerised systems, such as databases and CRM systems such as Salesforce, internal networks, email, SharePoint and various other online or offline platforms that support the storage and transfer of internationalisation knowledge.

Some of the main reasons that efforts for the transfer of internationalisation knowledge in hotel chains fail, is that it has several challenges. The properties of knowledge itself are such that complicate things. As seen in both literature review and in this chapter, the degree of tacitness, ambiguity and complexity are some of the main issues (Argote et al., 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008) and it is these properties that dictate the amount, quality and type of knowledge that can be transferred. Apart from these issues however, there are several other challenges that may hinder the efforts of hotel chains to facilitate the effective transfer of internationalisation knowledge. One of the main issues is the relevance of the knowledge being transferred. The computerised systems in place with the advances in technology, as well as the robust processes to acquire and store knowledge, have the ability to process and hold vast amounts of information, data and other organisational knowledge. Some of it might be relevant and some of it might not be as helpful. The individual therefore exposed to all this, will need to search and select the relevant parts, which might be overwhelming, time consuming and not necessarily relevant to the particular international project. Another challenge that stems from this, is the relevance of internationalisation knowledge, and specifically market and institutional knowledge, to a different market, and whether an effort should be made to transfer it. The findings agree with the literature on the relevance of

internationalisation knowledge to other markets. Internationalisation knowledge acquired in a market may be relevant to another. As this indirectly relates to the transfer of knowledge, it will be discussed later on. A challenge in transferring knowledge within hotel chains is individual initiative and management motivation. Knowledge transfer does not happen on its own, and several initiatives need to be introduced in order to facilitate it. Previous research has also shown that one third of these firm initiatives, fail and stop (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Galbraith, 1990). The members of the international development team will decide the level of engagement that they will have with the systems in place, other than the duties that are obligatory, which will determine the level and quality of the knowledge that is being transferred. This depends on the individual workload, motivation and also operational understanding of these systems and processes in place, which in general the research has shown that are not looked upon in a favourable manner but are perceived as bureaucratic and unnecessary. This is identified within previous research that shows that individual attitudes play a role and can impede the process or even stop it completely due to an unwillingness to contribute (De Correia et al., 2019; Dunford, 2000; Grandori & Kogut, 2002; Shiue et al., 2010). At the same time, managerial initiative and motivation plays a major role in knowledge transference within hotel chain development and taking steps to facilitate it would support these efforts. Management discretion will determine how this transfer will occur, as well as the quality and quantity of it. This is consistent with the literature that supports that two of the most important reasons that might impede the transfer of knowledge in organisations, are lack of dedication of the management and leadership to transfer and share knowledge, and the absence of behavioural examples or role models in the organisation (Aguzzoli et al., 2021; Almeida et al., 2022; De Correia et al., 2019; Desouza, 2003). Management motivation against 'knowledge hoarding' is another example of how this might impact knowledge transfer (Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz, 2020). The element of management discretion has also been discussed by Petersen, Pedersen and Sharma (2003), who added it as an important element missing from the theory in knowledge acquisition and transfer, when reviewing the Uppsala model of internationalisation. According to the findings, it is therefore up to the individual regional heads, continental heads and global heads as well as other in a leading capacity within development, to allow for the facilitation for this transfer to occur. This depends

largely on their perception of whether the specific learnings and knowledge acquired would be relevant for others or not. The research shows that this can be inconsistent with some members of the international development team feeling that knowledge captured in one region is irrelevant to another and the opposite, while others support that it would be to a certain extent and that some of that knowledge can be invaluable. In general, hotel chains do encourage their internal agents to participate and actively engage in the processes of creating, storing, sharing/ transferring and re-using internationalisation knowledge. This is in agreement with the research findings of Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016), who also suggest the support of employees and a special effort to encourage them participate in these activities by drawing from the organisational culture and also technological tools available to them.

Another challenge that has emerged through the findings, is that of confidentiality. International projects for hotel chains can worth vast amounts of money and may involve new patents and sensitive technology that members of the internationalisation team need to be very discreet with. This need therefore for confidentiality, requires a high level of controls in place when it comes to transferring internationalisation knowledge, limiting the access options for developers.

Finally, an issue that may affect the transfer of internationalisation is the size of the hotel chain. As seen in the beginning of this part of the thesis, the large-sized hotel chains tend to have several different regional offices and sub-divisions. The results of this is that not all members of the international development department know each other, limiting thus the opportunities for networking, relationship building, and as a result the transference of knowledge. The size has also to do with the number of brands operating under the hotel organisation. Development teams for different brands may do things differently, depending on the brands themselves and their market orientation, as well as the management that leads those teams which will also have an impact on the transfer of knowledge in-between those teams.

This section has discussed the findings in relation to the transfer of internationalisation knowledge in hotel chains, and several different factors affecting the flow in-between

HQs and the units, as well as within and without the organisation, have been identified. These can be categorised as factors that enable or restrain the transfer of knowledge during the internationalisation process and can be seen in table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3: Factors enabling or restraining knowledge transfer in hotel chains, during internationalisation

Factors enabling knowledge transfer	Factors restraining knowledge transfer
Training & Shadowing	Embeddedness of TK
Staff rotation	Use of personal aids (phone, email, etc.)
Succession planning	Bureaucracy
Reporting systems in place	Knowledge hoarding
Team meetings	Personal and Management motivation and attitude
Briefings	Level of tacitness, ambiguity and complexity of knowledge
De-briefings (end of projects)	Relevance of knowledge transferred
Conferences (locally & globally)	Non user-friendly processes
Networks, informal ties & relationships	Confidentiality of knowledge
CRM systems (Salesforce)	Size of hotel chain
Databases (Shared Drives, Email, etc.)	Lack of processes in place

Source: Grouped via research data

5.3.4 Re-application of stored knowledge in the internationalisation process

Continuing the discussion on the relevance of the acquired and stored internationalisation knowledge in terms of new international expansion projects, the research shows that market specific and institutional internationalisation knowledge might not be applicable to new markets, especially when those markets are geographically distant and do not have many similarities between them. The research shows that a small part of it may be transferable to a different market, but not a large part of it, as it is tailored to specific markets. This is supported by the literature as well, which highlights that markets differ from each other at different degrees (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). This internationalisation knowledge includes knowledge of an institutional nature, as well as of a business nature, both of which cover the necessary

required knowledge of how to do business in that particular market. This knowledge might be used a basis upon a hotel chain can develop their plans. It will be directly relevant if this stored knowledge is from the same market and would just be a case of updating it. Feasibility studies for new international projects are common reports, produced by international development offices and focus on specific market intelligence. Although the market specific knowledge might need to be updated after some time, the institutional knowledge contained will be still relevant. The research has shown that emerging markets have a lot in common and some experiences and learning gained in one market, may be applicable to another. Although market specific knowledge is most valuable when it comes to international development, the stored knowledge that can be re-applied in its' entirety, is internationalisation knowledge. These learnings and experiences form a basis that is applicable to any market, and using that as core, the developer starts building around it a strategy based on the market specifics. This knowledge informs the methodology, processes, and policies that shape internationalisation projects abroad and is stored within the structures of the hotel chain as well as within the members of the international development team as tacit knowledge. It is this knowledge that will inspire and guide the international developer through past experiences and skills acquired, brings all these together in a meaningful way. Internationalisation knowledge obtained in a foreign market therefore is transferable to other markets abroad and with adaptations and adjustments and taking into consideration the new stakeholders involved as well as the market specificities (institutional and business knowledge), it can be re-applied successfully. This is consistent with the 'think global and act local' phrase that is used within the world of hotel chain international development. The literature also covers this extensively, highlighting that internationalisation knowledge is not country market-specific and can be used and transferred in different markets (Eriksson et al., 2000; Petersen et al., 2003; Zahra et al., 2000). The above is also in accordance with the so called behavioural 'U-model' of internationalisation, established in the theory of the growth of the firm (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). The research supports this view, showing that hotel chains tend to follow an incremental expansion strategy, largely based on their ability to gather EK.

The re-application of stored knowledge has an impact of both the speed and cost of internationalisation projects. Hotel chains that have the ability to tap into stored knowledge are able to save costs that would incur should they have to start collecting intelligence and building feasibility studies from the beginning. Gathering institutional and business knowledge that is up to date can have significant costs. When it comes to internationalisation knowledge, the hotel chain will be able to complete international projects faster, by processing them more effectively, negotiating contracts faster and with more confidence and therefore finalising deals in a more efficient manner. The literature is in agreement with this, as the lack of internationalisation knowledge results in increased costs during projects abroad (Eriksson et al., 2000), and supports that re-using the accumulated hotel chain knowledge is of a fundamental importance (Aguzzoli et al., 2021; Sousa et al., 2021). An experienced member of the international development team will be able to deal with international expansion projects faster, by understanding what the challenges are, being pro-active and anticipating potential issues and dealing with them in a timely and confident manner. This can have an impact on legal costs which according to the research can be significant. Hotel chains tend to first expand to a new country, usually their capital city, by using one of their core brands. Once this has been established and have a better understanding of how things work, they then expand to a secondary market, within the same market, sometimes using a different brand from their portfolio. This allows them to re-use existing stored knowledge, especially if it has been acquired recently, which will have a direct impact on speed and costs. This is consistent with the notion of incremental development when internationalising, covered in the literature review.

5.4 Usefulness of knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains

The interviewees referred to several different types of knowledge that is useful during the internationalisation process. The research has identified four major types of knowledge that are important during the internationalisation process and help minimise related risks and have been categorised based on the literature: congenital or prior knowledge, market knowledge (business knowledge & institutional knowledge) and

internationalisation knowledge (Babinska, 2013; Eriksson et al., 1997). These four categories are analysed below:

Congenital knowledge

Congenital knowledge is the 'prior knowledge' that is embedded within the organisation and affects all processes and mechanisms of decision making (Babinska, 2013). This is the starting point for most international hotel chains, as it provides guidance and direction and informs the strategic vision, mission and hotel chain objectives. Congenital knowledge relates to the hotel chains brand as well. It relates to its unique characteristics, branding and standards which can differ from country and to country and region to region. These standards and locational requirements might relate to construction needs and characteristics, brand space requirements and hotel construction details, operational costs, human resources approach, financial requirements such as asset and capital structure and problem-solving procedures. A thorough knowledge therefore of all these, will provide the development team with a strong understanding of which aspects of the hotel chain brand can be adapted to the local environment and which cannot. It will also provide them with a better understanding of the general fit of that brand to the particular new market. Congenital knowledge therefore can prove to be important when internationalising, as it can help reduce the risks when a contract or deal is signed, as it will give the development team an understanding of the boundaries of the brand and determine the flexibility of the particular brand in terms of expectations and also adaptations. One of the main reasons that congenital knowledge is important, is that it can provide the development team with an understanding and appreciation of the way the hotel chain does deals and its contractual structure, as well as all risk-taking boundaries and flexibility. Development teams will be exposed to congenital knowledge through their work with the hotel chain and its brands. The processes, mechanisms and the way things are done, will inform their actions and the way they will perform their duties. Congenital knowledge is available to the international development team, via the internal information knowledge acquisition sources.

Institutional knowledge

Institutional knowledge includes all the information of a country or market's policies, law and all other controlling mechanisms as well as all societal and cultural aspects of life (Eriksson et al., 2000) and according to the literature, it can be acquired more easily than the other types of knowledge (Brennan & Garvey, 2009). The research findings are consistent with the literature. Institutional knowledge is most helpful before the decision to internationalise to specific location is made, and the consequent strategy to expand there. It relates to the 'wellbeing' of the targeted destination and involved the market's political and sociocultural profile. The development teams of hotel chains, in the beginning of the first stage of the internationalisation process, will have to investigate the political, economic and societal situation, in order to develop a thorough understanding of it. They are particularly interested in understanding the long-term stability of the country, security issues, transparency and corruption levels and assessing the psychic distance of that market. When looking at the financial stability of the location, they seek to develop an in-depth understanding of the general financial stability of the market, currency strength, potential for development, growth and other macro-economic risks. They further seek to understand related legislation, the ease of doing business in the country and also the cost structure, such as land costs, labour costs and minimum wage as well as general employment laws.

A large part of institutional knowledge relates to local culture and the way things are done in the particular market, in terms of behaviour and management as well as hotel operations. New members of the hotel chain development teams are trained on the cultural values and the different negotiating styles relating to the major markets that they are currently working in. Hotel chains expect their developers to continue growing their knowledge and understanding, which will support them in the successful completion of future expansion projects. The sources that members of the hotel chain development team utilise to acquire institutional knowledge range from the company training they receive, to books and reports, colleagues, networks and relationships as well as field experiences. Operations must adapt based on the same principles, and institutional knowledge will provide a framework through which the development teams can deliver specific brands to those markets. As the first steps within the internationalisation process involve developing a familiarity with the way things are

done in a market, institutional knowledge will determine if a brand is appropriate to expand with or the adaptations would have to be too great which would have an impact on the brand concept itself. These norms can range, from the expected size of a room by guests and the geography of the location including the frequency of natural disaster threats, to a management style that is in line with the local way of working.

Business knowledge

This type of knowledge is essential for the hotel chain developers to have an understanding of the business conditions existing within the markets of interest. This knowledge needs to be precise and up to date, so that they can prepare feasibility studies that will truly reflect the current situation and also potential of their markets of interest. In order to build an understanding of the capacity, wellbeing and profitability of a market, the required knowledge includes detailed information on four main performance metrics: ADR (average daily rate), Occupancy rates, RevPAR (Revenue per available room) and GOPPAR (Gross operating profit per available room). Although this information might be straight forward for hotel chains to acquire, knowledge of local peculiarities in terms of the way the market operates and also that ability to engage with local contacts, build networks and relationships and the understanding of how to go about them, is something that cannot be done without local support. The support can be found in collaborations with local partners that work independently or in teams and involve, hotel owners, investors, suppliers, brokers, lawyers, consultants, bankers, architects, independent financial advisers, local officials, development companies that offer complete solutions and others that are possible to collaborate with but have not been specifically identified by this research. The research has highlighted the importance of working with a local partner, in relation to business knowledge, when internationalising as it reduces uncertainty and provides access to unique market insights and information, including access to local networks, which can be critical in certain markets. This finding is consistent with previous research that identifies the importance of business knowledge (Eriksson et al., 2000). It also includes knowledge flowing through suppliers and distributors (Cui et al., 2005), making it also very important as a strategic resource for the internationalising hotel chain. Again, the research highlighted the importance of trust in engaging with contacts abroad, as well

as the value of respecting the local language and customs, which can be critical in closing deals in some parts of the world. Local partners can resolve these issues as they can act as an intermediate between the two sides.

Business knowledge also refers to knowledge related to competitive rivalry in the target market. Hotel management teams pay close attention to competitor activities in the target market, as an understanding of the strategy and approach that they use will provide a clear view of the needs, capacity and potential opportunities, in an effort to devise the most effective and profitable expansion plan. Such analyses can provide a clear of identification of market gaps, which will inform the decision of the hotel chain to expand in the particular market or not, and with which brand. Luxury brands for example, are almost never the first to enter a market. They would wait and observe competition and if the chain they are part of, owns brands in the middle scale, they would use that first to understand the market and its capabilities better.

Although demographics would be categorised as institutional knowledge, they can have an impact on decisions that have to do with prices and the amount of money the locals or visitors would be willing to spend and therefore some aspects of it could also be categorised as business knowledge. This is particularly important for luxury hotel chains, as the main requirement for them to enter a market, is whether or not it can support luxury brands. Other useful business knowledge includes tourism growth, growth of alternative types of tourism and travel, conference travel and religious tourism. Finally, business knowledge would also include an understanding of business events and general business health within the market that would have an impact on movement or economic wellbeing of a specific geographic sector in the market, such as transportation issues, the closure of a major organisation within the location of interest, and the general wellbeing of other businesses.

Internationalisation knowledge

The research has shown that experience acquired in the field during the expansion efforts of a hotel chain, informs the organisational processes, structures and decision-making mechanisms, assisting the business in other internationalisation projects,

through the development of a universal methodology and framework that can be applied to any given market. This is consistent with the literature that states that this type of knowledge refers to the “experiential knowledge of the firm’s capability and resources to engage in international operations” (Eriksson et al., 1997) and it includes experiential knowledge gained through the operation of a unit in a foreign market (Johanson & Vahne, 1977), as this knowledge is embedded in the hotel chain routines, procedures and decision mechanism structures and guides the behaviour of the business and essentially represents the ‘know-how’ of it (Hadley & Wilson, 2003). All of the hotel chains that participated in the research have well established internationalisation processes that they apply for each new international project, testing their methodology and improving it if needed, through adding new procedural elements to it, in very similar manner to the stages conceptualised by Kolb’s learning cycle: observation and reflections; creation of concepts and generalisation; testing of concepts in new circumstances; and field experience (Kolb, 1976). Challenges experienced in the international market that a hotel chain is moving to, will be taken into consideration and further layers that aim to reduce risk will be added to the internationalisation process that they use. One of the ways of reducing risk and also acquiring some second-hand internationalisation knowledge, is working with a developer that possess that local knowledge or any other local partner. This may be also be seen as ‘grafting’ internationalisation knowledge into the hotel chain, by hiring local market experts. Although development professionals tend to stay with the same hotel chain, there is some movement between different companies. The departing developers cannot take any documentation or contacts with them; however they will carry the internationalisation knowledge that remains embedded within them. The knowledge can be transferred to the next hotel chain development team they will start to work for, informing their internationalisation processes, methodology and decision-making mechanisms.

Internationalisation knowledge seems to have different levels of usefulness. For example, for hotel chains that work exclusively with partners based in international markets, internationalisation knowledge will have to do with the methodology used to achieve these partnerships and also with the brand standards and their applicability with

the new markets. For hotel chains that use a combination of FDI as well as other 'asset light' models, the need to internationalisation knowledge will be greater. It is suggested therefore that the more involved hotel chains are, in terms of capital and resources, into a foreign market, the higher the need for internationalisation knowledge. Although most hotel chains are mainly using 'asset light' modes of entry when internationalising, some are also involved in FDI and real estate, which carries a higher risk for the organisation. This seems to be consistent with the suggestion that the experiential knowledge requirements during the internationalisation process, might not be the same for all firms (Eriksson et al., 2015).

Internationalisation exposure will also equip the members of the development team of the hotel chain with operational knowledge, mainly related to the brand standards, but also a general operational understanding of an architectural, legal or hotel operations nature. This is particularly useful, as the particular member of the development team leading the specific relationship will act as the main point of contact between the hotel chain and the partner or operator. This knowledge is helpful in order to establish a meaningful relationship with the partner, through a better understanding of the needs of the other party, which will also inspire trust. It can also reduce costs and help complete international projects faster, through the ability of the international developer to complete a project efficiently and faster, due to the accumulated internationalisation and operational knowledge they hold. Overall, this type of knowledge can support the hotel chain international development, by providing insights and a holistic understanding of the individual brands themselves and their characteristics, inform the internationalising framework and methodology in turn, and be available to be applied to other markets. The research has revealed that hotel chains involved in other sectors, such as retail and independent food and beverage, also use the same internationalisation processes and mechanisms to approach related deals.

Hotel chain internationalisation knowledge is extremely important as it provides, knowledge of how to do things and also knowledge of organisational capabilities, both essential for international growth. The research suggests that the more the internationalisation knowledge of a hotel chain, the less the risks and the better the

ability to deal with challenges in the foreign market. It is therefore possible that hotel chains with cumulative internationalisation knowledge can complete international projects faster, with less costs and more effectively. These findings are consistent with the general international business theory on internationalisation knowledge (Casillas & Moreno- Menendez, 2014; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Zhou and Guillén, 2015). It is important to also highlight the finding of the possibility for hotel chains to apply the same internationalisation methodology and processes to other sectors that they may be trading in.

5.5 Importance of experiential knowledge

The literature has identified that knowledge gained through experience, is embedded within individuals and that it is also viewed as being embedded within processes, structures and the overall organisational decision-making mechanisms. In fact, most authors have focused on experiential knowledge and learning at a firm level (Dau, 2015; Eriksson et al., 1997, 2000; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). Walsh and Ungson (1991) identified individuals and their 'memory aids' as an integral and important part of the organisational memory, or the capacity to hold knowledge. Kogut and Zander (1993, 1992), emphasised the role of individuals and the organisational principles through which these individuals collaborate within organisations. The same authors viewed the organisation as a "repository of capabilities" (Kogut & Zander, 1992, p. 396), dependent on the knowledge that is engraved in the stable relationships between individuals, within the organisational structure. Oviatt and McDougall (2005), further argued that the experiences of individual key managers within the structures of an organisation can significantly support and even substitute a large portion of the actual firm level experience, during internationalisation. The findings are consistent with the published research, however, the importance of the individual within the process of hotel chain internationalisation is much more prevalent. The research findings highlight the individual as a key element within the process of knowledge management and learning, as it is the members of the hotel chain development teams that spearhead expansion projects abroad and personally acquire experiential knowledge which remains embedded within them and only a certain proportion of that can be transformed into

explicit knowledge. Further to this, the EK that remains embedded within the member of the international development team will not be part of the organisational memory once this individual leaves. Although this finding re-calibrates the traditional view of EK from a firm level to a staff level, showing that both views should be taken into consideration, it acknowledges and highlights the importance of the individual, as an essential part of the process of learning and managing knowledge during the internationalisation of hotel chains.

According to the research findings, hotel chain international development professionals consider as international business experience, any experience acquired personally in the field and involved international expansion, in different hotel chains, as well as other service sectors such as international business consulting, or even finance and real estate. The findings also have shown that the general experience within hotel development relates to the roles and responsibilities within the hierarchical structure. More specifically, there is a relationship between the years of experience and the roles within the international development department suggesting that the more the experience international business, the higher the position within the hierarchical structure, with an average number of years in hotel chain international development of 18 years. The average number of years of international experience for directors of international development is 10 years, for VPs and SVPs 20 and global heads 26. EK is essential within hotel chain international development, and it is regarded as a key quality for developers. This appears to be of extreme importance for small sized hotel chains that have smaller international development teams as well as less resources in relation to medium and large sized hotel chains that can support less experienced or new developers with training and on-the-field exposure. This finding is consistent with the literature that supports that smaller businesses might face obstacles in their efforts to internationalise, due to limited resources, capital, time and management, in comparison to larger corporations that are able to absorb challenges easier (Buckley, 1989). Shuman and Seeger (1986) supported that a business of a smaller size deals with different size-related difficulties, in comparison to larger businesses and they tend to behave in a different manner as well, when coping with external influences.

The acquisition of experiential knowledge is also particularly important for members of the development team, as it supports them to develop their cultural understanding, improve their knowledge, skills and abilities and enhance their understanding of processes and operations. These are different elements, that show the importance of experiential knowledge within hotel chain international development and are discussed further below.

5.5.1 Development of cultural understanding

The terms cultural distance and psychic distance can often be used interchangeably in the literature. The difference between them is something that the research findings highlight, showing that psychic distance refers to the individual level of the international developer, while cultural distance to the firm level. This distinction has also been made by Sousa and Bradley (2006), explaining those two different perspectives.

Cultural understanding is extremely important for the internationalising hotel chain. The literature review has identified cultural distance as one of the potential risks during the internationalisation process (Eriksson et al., 2015; Hadley & Wilson, 2003). According to the literature, the more the perceived cultural differences between the home country (HQ basis) and the new international market, the higher the internationalisation risk (Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Petersen et al., 2003). The research findings also shows that the development of cultural understanding leads to the reduction of risks. This is achieved through learning the local culture and the way things are done in that market and therefore becoming more sensitive towards it. This will support the hotel chain and the individual developers in understanding how to adapt to these differences, as well as help them adapt an appropriate negotiation style, and build relationships based on trust and understanding. All these elements are part of a market's institutional knowledge and contribute to the effective transition and implementation of hotel chains brand into a new market abroad. The research however has also highlighted that this type of knowledge can be best acquired in person through exposure in the new market. The sensitivity and understanding needed to successfully contact business deals when internationalising, is not something that can be only acquired through explicit sources,

and personal experience is essential. The cultural sensitivity and understanding also links to the knowledge, skills and abilities of the member of the international development team, as one supports the other, and this is discussed below.

5.5.2 Development of knowledge, skills and abilities

The research has shown that experiential knowledge, acquired internationally, has several different attributes. The main attributes or qualities that have been highlighted through it, are referred to as knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA), and are acquired on an individual level. These however in turn contribute to the experiential knowledge bank of the hotel chain, something that is also supported by the knowledge-based theory (KBT). As the individual developers develop their KSA through exposure in foreign markets, the resulting body of experiential knowledge will inform the decision-making mechanisms of the hotel chain and also be used in the recognition of the different choices relating to the internationalisation process of it. For example, the enhanced personal KSA, which may involve cultural understandings, people skills and the ability to build trust, will result in more effective negotiating skills, as well as the ability to formulate meaningful business relationships faster. KSA can be acquired through learning experiences in foreign markets, which can be both successes and failures. Learning through these failures will lead to the ability to avoid future pitfalls and recognise issues through better judgement and knowing where to look and what questions to ask, being therefore more effective. Learning through mistakes, inherently carries risks. It is however the only way that members of the international development team of a hotel chain can develop their KSA and as a result accumulate internationalisation knowledge on a firm level. According to the literature, a way of obtaining some of these learnings and not being exposed to any risks, is by observing competitors when they internationalise (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Pellegrino & MacNaughton, 2017). This however refers to general internationalisation knowledge and learnings on a hotel chain level, as the skills and abilities of the international developers need to be acquired through personal experience. The role of the individual within the process of learning and knowledge management within the internationalisation process of hotel chains again is highlighted through the present

research, showing the importance of it, which has not always been acknowledged by the literature distinctively, preferring to focus more on an organisational level (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977).

5.5.3 Development of processes and operations

The discussion on internationalisation experiential knowledge above as well as the general findings can be dichotomised into experiential knowledge that refers to internationalisation processes and also experiential knowledge that refers to operational elements. Although knowledge on these operational elements, such as how brand standards can be implemented within a different cultural environment, could be considered part of the general internationalisation knowledge, the research has highlighted the distinctive importance of it within this body of knowledge. The repetitive use of experiential knowledge, and the ability to avoid issues and other risks due to these prior learnings, can lead to the faster completion of international expansion projects for hotel chains. The concepts of speed and time within the internationalisation process, have been examined by several different authors, concluding that EK can have an impact on them (Bengtsson, 2004; Casillas et al., 2009; Eriksson et al., 1997; Hadley & Wilson 2003; Petersen et al., 2003;). Within hotel chains, the speed and time that the internationalisation process takes, can be affected by the amount of accumulated experiential knowledge stored within the firm, as well as its ability to retrieve and deploy it.

The above connection between increased EK, increased speed and lower costs, is in line with previous research on this subject (Bengtsson, 2004; Casillas et al., 2009; Eriksson et al., 1997; Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Petersen et al., 2003). The present research has also identified that the individual KSA that a hotel chain developer holds, is the most important type of experiential knowledge when it comes to speed and time. Although other types of knowledge, such as institutional and market knowledge are important, the individual KSA of a developer will play an essential role in the process.

Experiential knowledge of internationalisation processes and operations can also lead to costs savings, not only in relation to the speed and time and the ability to make the right decisions, but also in costs related project requirements, such as consultancy fees, architectural plans, and supplier related decisions. An experienced international developer working for a hotel chain, will be able to provide instructions that are more accurate and suit better the brand standards. Further to this, the experiential knowledge accumulated within the developer will provide a higher level of confidence when it comes to the support that is needed when developing projects with partners such as lawyers, architects and consultants, which may result in the need for less services and therefore less costs.

On a similar level, the research has also found that the EK that a hotel chain holds, will have an impact on the decision of a suitable mode of entry for the new market and therefore operational decisions. Having deployed a certain hotel chain brand in a new market will provide invaluable EK to the firm, related to the actual operations and the brand standards and an in-depth understanding of any adaptation requirements. The success of operational decisions during the deployment stage of the internationalisation process can be affected by the amount of EK the hotel chain holds. Some examples of operational decisions that could be affected by the EK a hotel chain holds, can be the staffing levels required for a specific location, the management style needed, supply routes and availability as well as hotel space design requirements. The critical impact EK has, within the market entry mode choice of service firms, has been highlighted in previous research (Blomstermo et al., 2006; Erramilli & Rao, 1990).

Overall, EK has been identified as the most critical type of knowledge during the hotel chain internationalisation process, as it provides strong cultural understandings, enhances the KSA on both individual and firm level, which can lead to reduced risks and internationalisation costs as well as the development of processes related to internationalisation and operations, through informed and effective decision making.

5.6 Revised conceptual framework

The present chapter has discussed the findings of the research, providing a deeper understanding of the underlining mechanisms that facilitate the learning and knowledge management processes of hotel chains during internationalisation. From a critical realist perspective, the findings show that the 'real' contains not only the individual developers as entities, but also different structures that operate at the same time behind the scenes and at different organisational levels, giving rise to events that take place in the 'actual' which in turn lead to events in the 'empirical' domain. As a result, the conceptual framework that was created based on the literature review (figure 2.11), depicting the hotel chain learning and knowledge management mechanisms during the internationalisation process, was adjusted to include the main findings that were analysed in the discussion chapter and can be seen in figure 5.6 in red, better reflecting what is happening in practice.

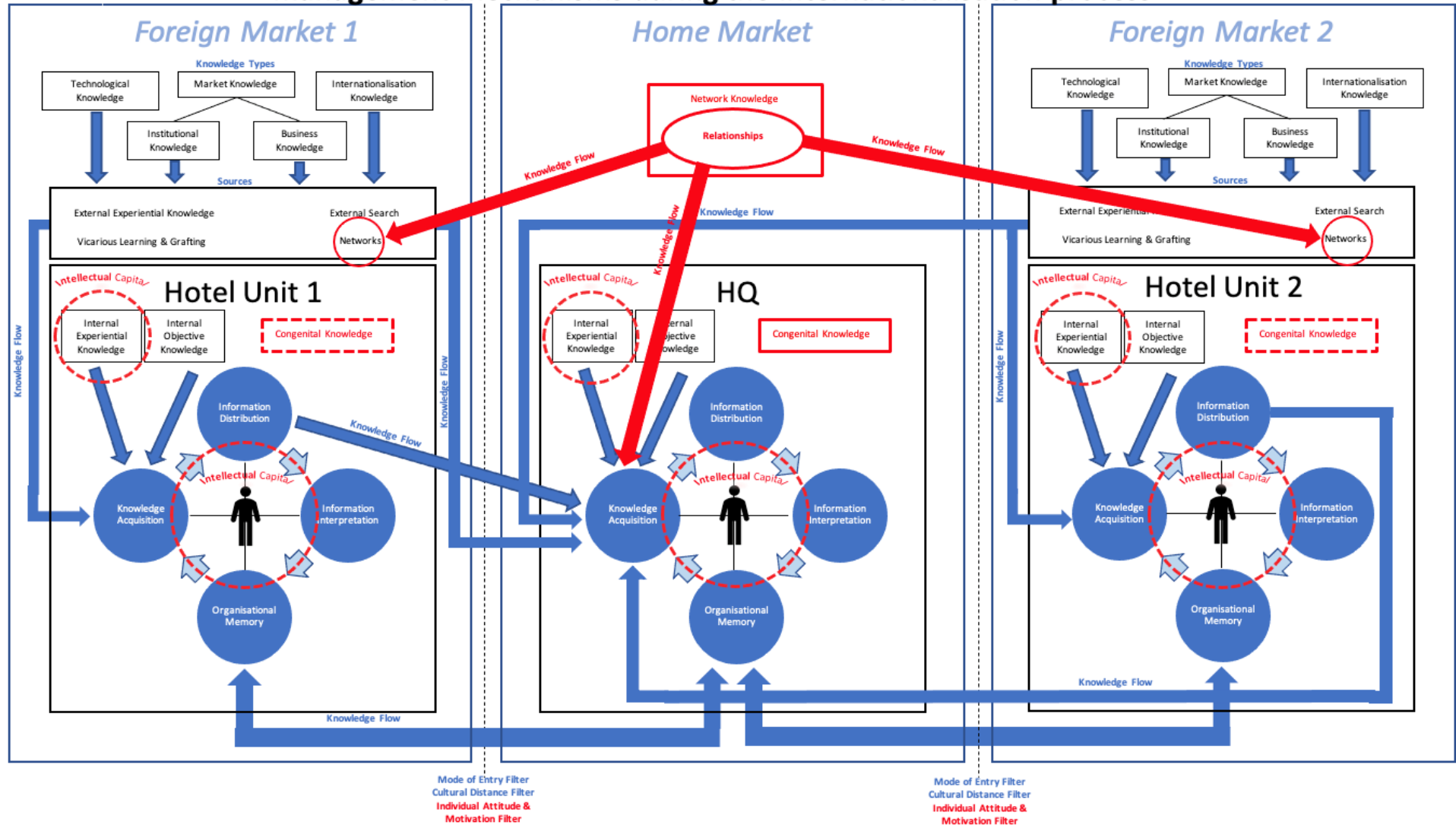
Congenital knowledge is the prior knowledge that lays within the internationalising hotel chain, in the form of internationalisation experience that individuals hold, or as knowledge embedded within the organisational culture, routines, brand standards and specifications. The findings have identified congenital knowledge as one of the most useful types of knowledge, as it can have a direct impact on the successful completion of international expansion projects. It can be found within the boundaries of the HQ, as it is an internal type of knowledge, and as a consequence within the two international hotel units, as it remains embedded within all organisational routines. The research has found however that the clarity and richness of congenital knowledge may be affected by the cultural distance and mode of entry filters.

The research findings have highlighted the criticality of the function of human agency within the mechanisms of managing knowledge and learning during the internationalisation process of hotel chains, and more specifically the importance of the role of the individual. This is not only because of the experiential knowledge that remains embedded within the individual developer, but also because of the role of the

individual's attitude and motivation towards knowledge sharing and transfer, which will have an impact on the mechanisms of organisational learning during internationalisation. This finding is reflected as an additional filter on the conceptual framework, having a direct impact on the knowledge flows to and from the HQ and units. Further to this, the importance of the role of the individual within the learning and managing knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains, is also captured within the concept of human capital and as part of the hotel chains' intellectual capital. This includes the knowledge, skills and abilities of the developers, as well as personal attitudes, obtained relationships, motivations and individual ACAPs. The intellectual capital can be seen in the conceptual framework, as residing within the internal experiential knowledge, and also as an extension of the individual developers' influence over the four learning and knowledge management mechanisms of the internationalising hotel chain.

Finally, personal relationships as part of the networks that members of the international development teams of hotel chains develop, can be a source of both objective and experiential knowledge. International developers create and maintain strong social and also professional bonds with a small number of other developers, often working for competitor hotel chains, exchanging different types of useful international knowledge. These relationships develop mainly regionally, but often expand beyond specific geographic locations, as networks grow through the movement of individuals and the expansion of international business activities. Relationships as a source of knowledge feed directly into the knowledge acquisition mechanism of the learning process of hotel chains, during the internationalisation process. This transfer of knowledge also takes place through the networks established in the foreign markets, flowing through personal contacts, often of a weak tie nature. These can be seen in the adjusted conceptual framework (figure 5.6), as knowledge flows stemming from network knowledge: relationships, feeding HQ knowledge acquisition as well as networks abroad, supporting the exchange of knowledge.

Figure 5.6: Revised theoretical framework to research hotel chain learning and knowledge management mechanisms during the internationalisation process



Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises and highlights the research contributions to knowledge and professional practice. It starts with a brief presentation of the research question, aim and objectives as well as a reminder of the methodology utilised. It continues with a summary of the findings, presented as per the objectives set in the thesis, addressing each point and concluding with the updated conceptual model. This is followed with the contributions made to theory, methodology and practice, and the research strengths and recommendations.

The thesis develops and presents an understanding of how hotel chains learn and manage knowledge during the internationalisation process. Stemming from the research question, three objectives were set, in order to explore the particular phenomenon and provide a holistic understanding:

1. How hotel chains, and their management development teams, capture, store, share/transfer and re-use knowledge obtained during foreign operations?
2. What is the type of knowledge that is useful for hotel chains during internationalisation, and what is the importance of experiential knowledge?
3. What is the role of networks within the hotel chain knowledge transfer process during internationalisation?

In order to explore and understand the above, a review of the literature was carried out (see Chapter 2), examining the theory on the internationalisation of service firms and the process and theory in general, culture and psychic distance, as well as the literature on knowledge management, organisational learning, absorptive capacity and

experiential knowledge. This was followed by an overview of the fields of knowledge transfer and knowledge flows. The review of the literature led to the formulation of a conceptual framework, representing the current understanding of the phenomenon of managing knowledge and learning, during the internationalisation process of hotel chains. A multiple case study approach was adopted to explore the phenomenon, within a critical realist framework, using semi-structured interviews with 16 members of development teams of international hotel chains, that were selected through a non-probability purposive sampling criterion and interviewed until data saturation occurred. As the interviews were conducted with heads of international development and other senior members of the hotel chain development teams, the data collected were rich and provided deep insights into the mechanisms of learning and knowledge management during internationalisation. The results were coded and analysed thematically producing a number of key findings, which informed the conceptual framework that was offered by the literature (figure 2.11). The original conceptual framework was adjusted, to reflect the theoretical contributions which were not adequately captured (figure 5.6). The objectives of the research are addressed below.

6.2 Objective 1: How do hotel chains, and their management development teams, capture, store, share/ transfer and re-use knowledge obtained during foreign operations

In all stages of the internationalisation process, hotel chains engage in learning activities in relation to the new market, in an effort to inform their decisions, mechanisms and structures, which will reduce related risks and support a more effective expansion strategy. These learning activities, involve the acquisition of both explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge can be captured via sources that can be distinguished into internal to the hotel chain, produced by the hotel chains conducting external search, and external, produced by sources independently of the hotel chains, as well as those that can be both. These can be seen below in table 6.1:

Table 6.1: Sources of explicit knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains.

Internal	External	Internal & External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility studies • Development team reports • Marketing and sales reports and updates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultant reports • Travel agent reports • Wholesaler reports • Newsletters • Competitor annual reports • Online sources (such as CIA World Fact Book). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market reviews • Partner reports • General country snapshots

Source: compiled by the author using interview information

Further to these, another source of explicit knowledge, is the knowledge that has already been acquired by hotel chains and sits within their repositories, as internal objective knowledge. This has been acquired through previous searches for different or similar internationalisation projects and can be re-used, or the hotel chain acquires it on regular intervals as part of its learning mechanisms.

The research suggests that the acquisition of explicit knowledge is the starting point of any internationalisation project for hotel chains. This is followed by the acquisition of tacit knowledge, which hotel chains value the most, as it provides them with a first-hand understanding of the foreign market, through direct exposure to it and therefore can better assess the risks and feasibility of international expansion projects. Although it is acknowledged that the majority of this knowledge will remain embedded within the member of the development team that has been exposed to the field, the research identifies ways that experience can be partly extracted in a meaningful way and be made available to the hotel chain. Under this light, tacit knowledge can also be distinguished into internal direct and external. These two types of sources for the acquisition of tacit knowledge can be seen in table 6.2 below. These findings expand on the sources of international knowledge identified by Fletcher and Harris (2012), and also providing an understanding of how these apply to hotel chain organisations.

Table 6.2: Sources of tacit knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains.

<p>Internal direct</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings • Reporting • Recording best practices • Succession planning • Information system • Internal networks 	<p>External</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vicarious learning (<i>learning by observing the behaviour of others</i>). • Weak ties (<i>refers to social networks that are characterised by a weak connection, such as acquaintances</i>). • Grafting (<i>refers to hiring new staff that carry the experience required to complete new projects</i>).
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Source: compiled by the author using interview information

Although some of the above internal sources have been identified through the literature under the generic subjects of networks or direct experience (De Pablos, 2002; Donate-Manzanares & Guadamillas-Gomez, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2000; Eriksson et al., 1997; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Freeman et al., 2010; Yang, 2004), succession planning and the need for its effective and regular implementation within hotel chain development teams was highlighted in this research as a source or major cause for the acquisition and transfer of knowledge, to ensure the continuity of expansion projects and the maintenance of networks and relationships with partners, which are deemed as invaluable in the world of hotel development. The research has also identified that smaller hotel chains, are less likely to transform tacit knowledge to explicit, due the lack of resources, time and the heavy workloads of the development team members, which force them to prioritise operational needs. The research has also identified that a reason for this, is the very low turnover and general staff movement within the world of hotel chain development management, which again does not make the extraction of tacit knowledge from members of the team a priority. Therefore, smaller hotel chains lack the formal mechanisms that facilitate the acquisition of tacit knowledge from members of the development team and focus their efforts on exposing the members of their teams to expansion projects abroad, gaining it first-hand. Larger hotel chains, are more able to utilise both, benefiting thus by having access to a larger pool of knowledge.

In addition, weak ties that members of the hotel chains development teams, develop and maintain over time are an important source of external tacit knowledge. This is different to vicarious learning, which is about learning from the experience of others, by observing and mimicking them, through networks, licensing, strategic alliances of corporate intelligence (Chandler & Lyon, 2009; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Huber, 1991). Weak ties as a source focuses on individual informal personal network relationships. The relationships are informal and develop among members of hotel chains' international development teams, and spread across different organisations, including competitors. Although, these relationships have been identified by the literature (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Harris & Wheeler, 2005), the present research provides greater insight into their strength and importance, expanding the understanding of their nature and application to hotel chains.

Finally, trust is a key to the process of creating, exchanging and transferring knowledge. It is viewed as an essential part in relation to building network relationships that facilitate learning. The research has found that the hotel chain development sector is largely self-regulated, through common understanding, sense of pride in the craft, reputation, professionalism and empathy towards colleagues.

Hotel chains possess different methods of storing the acquired knowledge, but this part of the learning process seems to be inconsistent across the industry due to the challenges that this task poses, as well as the general lack of central company policy or lack of direction. One of the main challenges of storing it is that the acquired knowledge needs to be first transformed into an explicit format, which due to heavy workloads and non-user-friendly electronic systems, might not be prioritised over other project activities. The geographical distance between units and HQs, language barriers, accessibility and intellectual property were identified as other reasons contributing to the difficulty of storing the acquired knowledge.

Captured knowledge may be kept in the aids of individual members of the development team, which can range from emails to diaries and electronic folders, which make their meaningful storing for the benefit of entire hotel chain, extremely difficult. The main

challenge however that has been highlighted by the research is the embeddedness of tacit knowledge and the acknowledgement by the industry that the majority of the acquired tacit knowledge will remain stored within the individual developer. This cannot be considered as organisational memory as it is knowledge that is not readily available and is not accessible by the organisation in the same manner that knowledge can be retrieved by other sources. Overall, the findings of the thesis on the storage of the acquired knowledge are consistent with the literature and highlight the issue of the embeddedness of tacit knowledge and the challenges around extracting it in a meaningful format and storing it. Most of the acquired tacit knowledge therefore remains stored within the individual members of the development team, showing the importance of the individual within the organisation as well as the criticality of continuously engaging in organisational learning activities that will support the transformation and storing of this knowledge. This is also consistent with the literature around intellectual capital, and more specifically, with the concepts of human capital and structural capital.

The transfer of certain levels of explicit and tacit knowledge within hotel chains is constant, as the in-house expertise continuously grows and expands, through participation in international expansion projects and engagement with internal mechanisms, the use of common mental models, communicating and interacting within teams. A large proportion of tacit knowledge remains embedded within the individual developers while international knowledge in general is kept within the different elements of the hotel chain internal memory and make up. Although some hotel chains have processes in place in an effort to facilitate the transfer of this type of knowledge, these are inconsistent and ineffective, while some do not have any systems in place or consider this as 'second-hand' knowledge thus not prioritising it. Social ties and relationships of an informal nature help alleviate these issues and are capable of facilitating knowledge transfer between geographically distant locations. These informal social ties formulate between developers of the same chain, within HQ and also between different regional offices and other supportive departments are one of the most effective ways of transferring the knowledge that exists in house. These informal social ties however, go beyond the limits of the hotel chains and involve, developers

based on competitive chains and other external development individuals and departments and are based on trust. The type of internationalisation knowledge mostly transferred over these social ties, is market specific knowledge. International knowledge transfer also occurs via vicarious learning, which takes advantage of the local knowledge and experience of others, through partnerships and other collaborations, as well as grafting, which facilitates the direct transfer of international knowledge into the structures, decision making mechanisms and other internationalisation processes of the hotel chain. Internally, hotel chains use several methods to encourage and facilitate knowledge transfer, such as training, rotation, shadowing and succession planning, with shadowing being the most important way in which experiential knowledge may be transferred between members of the development team. One of the main challenges in transferring knowledge within the hotel chain is managerial initiative, management discretion and employee motivation to engage with such practices. Other challenges involve the size of hotel chains and their structures, in terms of being conducive to knowledge sharing or not, confidentiality and the relevance of internationalisation knowledge which will determine its quality and amount. All of these factors have an impact on the transfer of internationalisation knowledge for hotel chains during internationalisation, by either having an enabling or restraining effect. These can be seen in table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3: Factors enabling or restraining knowledge transfer in hotel chains, during internationalisation

<i>Factors enabling knowledge transfer</i>	<i>Factors restraining knowledge transfer</i>
<i>Training & Shadowing</i>	<i>Embeddedness of TK</i>
<i>Staff rotation</i>	<i>Use of personal aids (such as phone, email, etc.)</i>
<i>Succession planning</i>	<i>Bureaucracy</i>
<i>Reporting systems in place</i>	<i>Knowledge hoarding</i>
<i>Team meetings</i>	<i>Personal and Management motivation and attitude</i>
<i>Briefings</i>	<i>Level of tacitness, ambiguity and complexity of knowledge</i>
<i>De-briefings (end of projects)</i>	<i>Relevance of knowledge transferred</i>

<i>Conferences (locally & globally)</i>	<i>Non user-friendly processes</i>
<i>Networks, informal ties & relationships</i>	<i>Confidentiality of knowledge</i>
<i>CRM systems (such as Salesforce)</i>	<i>Size of hotel chain</i>
<i>Databases (such as shared drive)</i>	<i>Lack of processes in place</i>

Source: compiled by the author using interview information

Knowledge captured during the internationalisation process may be re-applied to future expansion projects. This, however, involves only small parts of market specific and institutional knowledge, as they are not directly relevant to other markets, and will be mainly re-utilised in the same markets, after updating. Internationalisation knowledge however, as it is not country specific, is directly relevant, as it informs the decision-making processes and the models and methodology used in international expansion projects, enabling hotel chains to tap into it and draw from it at any given time. This will provide a universal approach to new markets for the hotel chain, which will then need to add the market specific elements for new international projects, which is consistent with the ‘think globally and act locally’ strategy. Internationalisation knowledge and specifically the experiential aspect of it, is also invaluable to the individual developer as it will support their personal development as professionals and therefore future projects of the hotel chain. The re-application of stored knowledge, both tacit and explicit, has an impact on the cost and speed associated with the completion of new internationalisation projects of hotel chains, as it helps to reduce risks and cut down on costs that have to do with legal services, suppliers and other location related costs, while provides the opportunity to developers to complete projects faster, by understanding better the challenges, risks and pitfalls and dealing with them in a pro-active and confident manner.

6.3 Objective 2: Which type of knowledge is useful for hotel chains during internationalisation and the importance of experiential knowledge

The types of knowledge that are the most useful during the internationalisation process of hotel chains are four: congenital, market business knowledge, market institutional

knowledge and internationalisation knowledge. Congenital knowledge relates to the in-house knowledge, embedded within the organisation that stems from the founders, HQ, and informs the culture of the hotel chain as well as the vision and strategy. It further relates to the brand characteristics, and therefore this type of knowledge is essential for being able to understand the needs, strategic fit, product adaptations possible and the overall feasibility of an expansion project. This understanding helps reduce the risks involved when internationalising and also supports the process of completing an international project through the processes and other hotel chain mechanisms that reflect this type of knowledge. The next type of knowledge that is useful during the internationalisation process is institutional knowledge. It helps inform decisions that relate to market choice and therefore it is essential in the first steps towards internationalisation, when a hotel chain considers expanding. It relates to political and socioeconomic factors, and apart from determining the stability and potential of the market, it can further support the development team in understanding the needs of the market from a behavioural, management style and operational side. Once hotel chains identify a location of interest, based on the environmental factors mentioned above, they will require an understanding of the performance of the market in order to determine the capacity of that location in supporting a brand. This will involve an in-depth understanding of metrics such as RevPAR, Occupancy and ADR, as well as rivalry, and the spending capacities of the target markets. It further relates to access to local networks and includes establishing knowledge flows through suppliers and distributors.

The experiential knowledge acquired during the entire expansion project, informs the hotel chain organisational processes and decision-making mechanisms, and supports the development of a universal framework and methodology that can be applied to any market. This methodology will be updated through the experiences acquired by engaging in different international projects which continuously feed into it, adding further elements that aim to reduce related risks and make the overall process more efficient and effective. Although tacit internationalisation knowledge is identified as the most valuable by developers working for hotel chains, it seems to have different levels of usefulness depending on the mode of entry utilised to enter new markets. For hotel chains that expand through FDI, the need for this type of knowledge will have a different

focus, due to the higher risk involved, than a hotel chain that expand through partners, which rely more on a methodology that focuses on contractual agreements and partnership building. Internationalisation knowledge requirements therefore might be different from hotel chain to hotel chain, depending on the chosen mode of entry, but its value is extremely significant in any case, as it provides hotel chains with the knowledge and understanding of how to formulate and deliver their internationalisation strategy, and it is not market specific.

The research suggests that hotel chains with high levels of internationalisation knowledge, will face less risks during the process of expanding abroad, and will be able to cope better with challenges. Cumulative internationalisation knowledge can support hotel chains to complete international projects faster and more efficiently, which will also have an impact on costs. This type of knowledge supports the development of a universal expansion framework, that allows hotel chains to approach any new market, including other hospitality or retail related sectors. The research findings are consistent with the literature on the usefulness of the different types of internationalisation related knowledge, and provide an insight into their significance and use, during the expansion process of hotel chains.

One of the key findings of the present thesis, is the role of the individual within the process of hotel chain internationalisation. Experiential knowledge gained in the field, remains embedded within the individual members of the development teams of hotel chains. Most authors view internationalisation knowledge from a firm perspective (Dau, 2015; Eriksson et al., 1997; Majkgard & Sharma, 1997, 2000), while some also explicitly mention individuals and their memory aids, as part of the wider organisational memory and highlight the importance of individuals within the process (Kogut & Zander, 1993, 1992; Oviatt & McDougall, 2005). Experiential knowledge is gained by the individual developers working in the field during the internationalisation process. This knowledge will remain tacit, and only a small part of it will become explicit. The embedded knowledge will remain within the individual developer, and it can therefore be considered part of the hotel chain as well, as they would be involved in the routines and

other internal processes, informing the company methodology. However, should this individual leave, the hotel chain will lose their knowledge.

The amount of tacit knowledge that can be transformed into explicit will depend not only on the initiative of management but also on the individual developer him/herself. Tacit knowledge therefore can be seen from both a firm and an individual perspective and the present research has highlighted the importance of the individual developer within the process of the internationalisation of hotel chains and the importance of social processes within the organisation.

Looking at internationalisation knowledge from a human resource perspective illustrates that the tacit knowledge acquired in the foreign market provides developers with a better understanding of the brand standards and general operational knowledge, as well as cultural appreciation and negotiation skills, which will have an impact on the speed of the completion of future projects and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of their work. Experience gained in the field is highly regarded within the hotel development industry as it supports not only the hotel chain on a firm level, but also helps developers improve their personal knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) and therefore the intellectual capital of the hotel chain, and more specifically it's human capital. The research suggests a relationship between the years of individual experience and the roles within the international development department of hotel chains, with the most years of experience corresponding to the position of international head of development, VP and SVP. Small to medium sized hotel chains tend to support their development department with flatter hierarchies, comprised with individuals with strong experiences in the development field. They also tend to recruit experienced individuals, and avoid training new staff from zero, due to their limited resources, capital and time.

6.4 Objective 3: The role of networks within the knowledge transfer process during the internationalisation process of hotel chains

The research has established that both internal and external networks play a significant role in transferring knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains. The internal networks and hierarchical structures, as represented in the SECI model and the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), facilitate the transfer of knowledge within the hotel chain, based on established processes. The findings show that hotel chains that engage in activities that encourage social interaction, do so in order to achieve higher levels of knowledge transfer, providing more opportunities for communication. This is in line with established research that views internal networks as crucial in the internal knowledge transfer process. The findings also show that cross-unit knowledge transfer may benefit the different development teams involved, however for this to take place, management motivations and attitude towards sharing practices would determine its success or failure. The research has also established that external networks play an active and important role in transferring knowledge from without the boundaries of the hotel chains. These external networks formulate between developers and external agents, such as other competitor hotel chain developers, hotel owners, investors and bankers, suppliers, consultants, and various contractors. These relationships are of both a weak and strong tie nature and can facilitate the exchange of mainly market specific knowledge. The research has also established that developers of a hotel chain, tend to formulate strong relationships with other developers working for competitive hotel chains. While these networks tend to be quite small, they formulate based on mutual trust, respect and collaboration and have the power of facilitating the transfer of other types of knowledge, including tacit and strategic internationalisation knowledge. Due to their characteristics and quality, these personal relationships, tend to last longer than other social network contacts which tend to follow the life span of an internationalisation project to its completion. As a result of this, these relationships can facilitate the transfer of experiential knowledge. Although the research has shown that the field of hotel chain development is characterised by an environment of collegiality, collaboration and trust, the confidential aspects of their work are well respected.

One of the issues of entering an unknown market for hotel chains, is the lack of access to local networks. Local agents or consultants can offer a solution to this. Hotel chains however that are interested in long term expansion in a new market, will also look to hire a director or VP of international development, with experience and networks in that market, through the practice of 'grafting'. The findings show that this practice is widespread and can speed up the process of internationalising into a new market, while lowering the risks. Developers spend several years building their personal networks, with different agents in different markets. They do however specialise in certain regions or markets and their networks might not extend beyond these. Hotel chains view the role and influence of these personal networks as extremely important, and often recruit specific developers with local knowledge in order to gain access.

6.5 Theoretical contribution

The findings contribute to literature from three fields: international business, the hotel industry, and the field of knowledge management and organisational learning. It answers calls for further qualitative studies that will provide a deeper understanding of the how hotel chains learn and manage knowledge when internationalising (Brock & Yaniv, 2007; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz, 2020; Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Ingram & Baum, 1997; Lindsay, et. al., 2003; Littlejohn et al., 2007; Pinho & Prange, 2016). More specifically, the thesis makes five clear contributions to the above bodies of literature: 1) Expands on the understanding of the learning and managing knowledge mechanisms and processes of hotel chains, during the internationalisation process; 2) Expands on the types of knowledge that are useful to hotel chains during internationalisation; 3) Confirms the importance of experiential knowledge and explores the issues of its embeddedness, the challenges around extracting and transferring it and the solutions that hotel chains implement; 4) Expands on the understanding of the roles of VP and Director of development and the importance of their individual work within the process; 5) Shows a different perspective from the established view of experiential knowledge and learning at a firm level, by

providing a focus on the role of the individual and identifying the importance that they have in the process. These are analysed further below:

- 1) The research offers a holistic overview of the knowledge management and learning processes in place during the internationalisation of hotel chains. More specifically, although the following internationalisation processes have been individually covered to a certain extent by the hotel industry literature: acquisition (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2016; Ingram & Baum, 2001), the storing (Engstrom et al., 2003), the transfer (Aizpurua et al., 2011; Aksu & Ozdemir, 2005; Garcia-Almeida & Yu, 2015; Ingram & Baum, 2001; Kyriakidou & Gore, 2005; Scott & Ding, 2008; Yang & Wan, 2004) and re-use and replication of knowledge (Garcia-Almeida & Bolivar-Cruz, 2020), are under-examined with respect to the hotel industry. While some authors have looked into organisational learning and knowledge management within the hotel industry (Aizpurua et al., 2011; Aksu & Ozdemir, Almeida et al., 2022; 2005; Bayraktaroglu & Kutanis, 2003; Donate et al., 2022; Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021), understanding the KM and learning processes involved within an internationalisation context is currently limited.

The research further identifies the sources of knowledge that are at the disposal of hotel chains during the internationalisation process, an area that has not been investigated thoroughly in previous literature (Fletcher & Harris, 2012), as research tends to focus on direct experience and networks (Autio et al., 2010; Dau, 2015; Eriksson et al., 1997; Freeman et al., 2010). Indeed, the research also identifies the value of networks as well as weak tie relationships in the hotel industry, as significant sources of knowledge, not only addressing the gap in the literature of the hotel industry (Brida et al., 2014), but by also bringing in further insights into the debate of whether knowledge originating from these sources translates directly into learning or experience (Brida et al., 2014; Chetty & Eriksson, 1998; Hadley & Wilson, 2003; Holm et al., 1996; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Welch & Welch, 1996). Personal relationships as part of the social networks of developers, have the capacity to facilitate the transfer of both

explicit and tacit knowledge. This is because developers tend to form long term professional relationships that have the ability to promote knowledge transfer. An interesting find in relation to the nature of these relationships is that they often include direct competitors. Although the importance of personal relationships and social networks have been identified in previous research on internationalisation (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990; Michailova & Nechayeva, 2014; Ojala, 2009), the thesis provides an understanding of their importance for hotel chains.

- 2) Further to this, the research proposes that there are four overall types of knowledge that play a significant role during the internationalisation process of hotel chains: prior knowledge, market institutional knowledge, market business knowledge and internationalisation knowledge, extending previous research (Babinska, 2013; Eriksson et al., 1997; Fletcher & Harris, 2012) by providing an understanding of their application in the hotel industry.

- 3) The research acknowledges the importance of experiential knowledge within the internationalisation process of hotel chains, which is in line with published literature (Altinay & Wang, 2006; Brookes & Altinay, 2017; Gross et al., 2017; Eriksson et al., 2015; Michailova & Wilson, 2008; Pla-Barber et al., 2014; Ubeda-Garcia et al., 2021), as well as the issues caused by the embeddedness of it (Bratianu, 2015; Donate et al., 2022; Petersen et al., 2003), highlighting the role of the individual within the process. It further provides insights into the KM and learning processes that hotel chains implement, in order to support the acquisition/ extraction and transfer of experiential knowledge. Although some of these processes have been identified by previous publications (De Pablos, 2002; Donate-Manzanares & Guadamillas-Gomez, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2000; Eriksson et al., 1997; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Freeman et al., 2010; Yang, 2004) the research provides an overview of these, as applied in the hotel chain sector. It further expands on the understanding of the concept of intellectual capital within the hotel industry (Babajee et al., 2020; Bontis et al., 2015;

Engstrom et al., 2003; Lindsay et al., 2003; Rudez & Mihalic, 2007) from the lens of the internationalisation process.

- 4) Hierarchical structures and the function of hotel chain developers in relation to their initiative, motivation, influence and experience, play a crucial role in knowledge transfer. Garcia-Almeida and Bolivar-Cruz (2020) have looked into the motivation and initiative of hotel management staff and the role they play in intra-organisational knowledge transfer but did not specifically examine the international development teams or used an internationalisation context. The thesis also identifies the VPs and Senior Directors and Directors of development, as part of the enabling mechanisms, in the learning process, expanding on the understanding of their role and offering insights as to how they support and facilitate these processes, as previously highlighted in literature (Aizpurua et al., 2011; Aksu & Ozdemir, 2005; Altinay, 2005; Altinay & Roper, 2001).

- 5) The research suggests that learning on an individual level may translate to enhanced learning on an organisational level, which is consistent with previous research (Aizpurua et al, 2011; Popescu et al., 2011; Yang, 2004). Some authors view learning and knowledge from an organisational perspective (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Aizpurua et al. (2011) have touched upon the link between the role of the individual in facilitating and contributing to organisational learning within hotels and Popescu et al. (2011) have suggested that although all employees can contribute to organisational learning and performance they should be approached differently, based on their work outcomes and needs. The present research takes this further, by highlighting the role of the individual within the organisational learning processes and knowledge management systems that take place during internationalisation, shedding more light into the relationship between individual learning and organisational learning, supporting the importance of both individual and organisational learning as two interdependent activities, in line with Seely-Brown's (1993) view of organisational learning as a community activity, the model devised by Lindsay et al. (2003) highlighting the role of the individual within the process and

knowledge transfer and the SECI model of organisational knowledge devised by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)

The thesis has utilised a critical realist approach, which has provided a deeper investigation of the mechanisms that support the management of learning and knowledge during the internationalisation of hotel chains. The results demonstrate that several structures, actors and other causal powers are operating at the same time at different levels of the hotel chain (figure 5.6). The literature review, the pilot study, the industry experience of the researcher and the analysis of the findings have all sensitised the research to identify, uncover and shed more light into these causal powers. This approach has provided rich understandings of the importance of networks, personal relationships and weak ties; the role of hotel chain intellectual capital and the importance of the individual within the process of learning and managing knowledge. Individual developers as actors within internationalisation can play a significant role in supporting or restricting the process. Although the individual developers as entities exist in 'the real', their actions are part of the 'causal mechanisms'. Their individual motivation, enthusiasm and willingness to engage with learning and knowledge management activities can have a significant impact on the process. From a critical perspective, human agency does have a direct impact on the development and maintenance of the intellectual capital of hotel chains, as the majority of tacit knowledge remains embedded within the individual developers. Further to this, personal relationships within networks as well as weak tie connections, as causal mechanisms, are supporting the transfer of both explicit and tacit knowledge during the internationalisation process of hotel chains. The critical realist approach has sensitised the research into an exploration of these networks and uncovered that these small networks include competitors and other actors, that work together informally within an environment of 'healthy' competition, supporting the exchange of knowledge.

6.6 Contributions to professional practice

The research provides insights into the management of knowledge and learning, during the international expansion of hotel chains. These cover from a holistic perspective, the

organisational learning processes of knowledge acquisition, knowledge storage, knowledge transfer and knowledge re-use and replication during internationalisation. An awareness of these distinct, yet inter-related and interdependent processes, would benefit the senior management of hotel chains and international development teams, in establishing systems and structures required to understand the opportunities and possibilities of utilising and managing knowledge for internationalisation. It provides them with a map of processes that should be in place, in order to facilitate the acquisition, storage, transfer and re-use of relevant knowledge.

Furthermore, the thesis identifies the sources of both tacit and explicit knowledge, available to the internationalising hotel chain. Again, an awareness of these should enable management to determine how to proceed in acquiring knowledge, based on their needs and size. It would further sensitise management to consider ways of making the capturing of both tacit and explicit knowledge less labour intense and think about ways of doing so avoiding bureaucratic protocols that are perceived by developers as time consuming and pointless. To this end, helping the developing teams understand the value of such activities and motivate them, would benefit the facilitation of this process. For the storing of knowledge, the research has pointed towards the direction of adopting a computerised KM system, that allows for knowledge to be captured in various different formats, making it user friendly and providing a central platform that developers can access from any unit located abroad. When it comes to the transfer of knowledge, the research suggests that management would benefit from acknowledging the in-house expertise, or intellectual capital as a business knowledge asset. Further to the implementation of a computerised KM system for the dissemination of knowledge that has been made explicit, hotel chain management should consider ways of encouraging social interaction and the building of internal networks amongst the developers based on HQ, in regional teams and supportive departments. Further to this, the thesis makes the following six contributions to professional practice:

- 1) The research expands on the understanding of the KM and learning processes taking place during the internationalisation efforts of hotel chains. It identifies the absorptive capacity aspects of these processes and provides a range of tools

to facilitate them. More specifically, it identifies the potential sources of knowledge and the ways that it can be acquired. It discusses ways of storing it and presents the considerations around the perceptions of the team around such practices. It covers transfer practices and way of sharing knowledge as well as re-using it. The management of hotel chains development team would benefit through the development of an understanding of the learning and knowledge management processes and how they all relate, considering a wider knowledge and learning framework, that will support and maintain these routines.

- 2) Secondly, it identifies the most important types of knowledge, in terms of supporting the internationalisation process and reducing the risks involved. Congenital knowledge is the starting point for hotel chains that internationalise. It feeds into all processes, mechanisms and organisational culture, informing the strategic vision, mission and hotel chain objectives and relates to brand standards as well. Developers need to be fully immersed and engaged with this type of knowledge as it dictates the way things are done within the organisation, which will guide their actions and decisions when on the field. Another type of knowledge that is important to management when exploring new international markets, is institutional knowledge. Management will benefit from an understanding of the new market's legislative mechanisms, the wellbeing of the economy, politics, as well as cultural aspects of it, as it will guide the internationalisation strategy of the hotel chain. Similarly, business knowledge, relates to the competition, capacity, wellbeing and profitability of an international market, including critical key performance indicators, such as ADR, RevPAR, Occupancy and GOPPAR which would provide insights into the options available to the internationalising hotel chain. Management needs to acquire business and institutional knowledge, involving all possible sources, including networks and local partners in order to obtain a thorough understanding of the new market. This understanding will support the development team, in proposing a more tailored internationalisation strategy, involving a suitable mode of entry, thus maximising long-term profits and minimising risks. Finally, management needs to be aware of internationalisation knowledge, which in the

industry is understood to be the international experience a developer gains through exposure, as well as the overall capabilities of the hotel chain to engage in international expansion projects. This type of knowledge informs the hotel chain decision making processes, as well as routines and structures relating to international projects, as it can be applied to any market, and an understanding of how to extract it, and having a mindset and structure that will allow for adaptations based on it, will provide the international development team with a better methodology for internationalising. This is particularly useful to the management of hotel chains of smaller size that might not have the same capacity to absorb risks and deploy resources as larger hotel chains would be able to, as well as to hotel chains that use FDI and real estate or other high-risk investments to internationalise.

- 3) Thirdly, it acknowledges the importance of experiential knowledge and also the issue of its embeddedness. Hotel chain development management do appreciate the usefulness and importance of experiential knowledge. Its acquisition provides a better appreciation of culture and develops the KSA of its members, increasing thus the individual level of ACAP and leading to less internationalisation risks, affecting the speed of completion of international projects, and reducing costs. The embeddedness issue that comes with it is something that the international development team management would need to focus on. Most of the captured experiential knowledge will remain embedded within the individual developer; however, efforts should be made to extract as much of it as it is possible. The management of the development teams would benefit by employing all possible ways of acquiring internally the tacit knowledge available and avoiding knowledge hoarding by its' members. These have been identified as: internal direct, meetings and other team group activities on a unit level and also across the chain, reporting, recording best practices and sharing these amongst chain units, engaging with succession planning, implementing a computerised KM information system, and encouraging social interaction and the development of internal networks.

- 4) It identifies the importance of networks and relationships of a weak-tie nature. The research has highlighted the importance of networks and relationships of a weak-tie nature, for the acquisition and transfer of knowledge during the internationalisation of hotel chains. It has also highlighted that access to these networks is invaluable and that it takes time to formulate them, as they operate on trust and mutual respect. The international development teams would benefit from forming and utilising these strategic networks, that involve investment companies, consultancy firms, banks, suppliers, investors and competitors. Hotel chains would benefit therefore from encouraging their development teams in engaging in industry events and conferences, as well as other opportunities to develop these networks and maintain them.
- 5) It provides a better understanding of the hierarchy within the international development teams and the significance of the role of directors, senior directors and VPs in the learning process of internationalisation. The findings of the present study further suggest that the level of effectiveness of any learning and knowledge management mechanisms, during the international process, depends on management motivation and attitude. Learning efforts require the appropriate cultural framework within the organisation, which in turn depends on the enthusiasm and attitude of senior management. Heads of international development and SVPs, in charge of the international development teams would need to actively support and maintain a positive attitude towards any learning and knowledge management efforts for them to be effective. This includes the encouragement and support of their teams, ensuring that they are aware of the benefits for the hotel chain development, as well as the appropriate tools and processes that will support these activities. It is further recommended that knowledge management and learning processes and routines are established from an early stage, in order to create learning standards for the hotel chain development teams and identify potential obstacles.
- 6) Finally, the findings of the research highlight the importance of the individual within the process and the importance of social capital or intellectual capital for

the internationalising hotel chain. A large proportion of internationally gained experiential knowledge, will remain embedded within the individual developer. An also large proportion of explicit knowledge is also likely to remain within personal records, files, emails and other storage units that might not be fully accessible by the hotel chain. These variables, in combination with the levels of motivation and enthusiasm in engaging with the knowledge management mechanisms of the hotel chain, as well as the danger of knowledge hoarding, place the individual developer in the middle of all efforts. The management of the hotel chain development teams would benefit by approaching all learning and KM efforts, considering the individual needs and level and not only from an organisational level. The knowledge residing within the individual members of the international development team, is part of the intellectual capital of the hotel chain. This is the sum of the knowledge residing within them, and may indirectly affect the strategy, performance and effectiveness of the international expansion efforts. It is recommended that management should focus on activities that support social interaction in order to maintain and develop this social capital as well as facilitate the exchange and transfer of experiential knowledge at each hierarchical level of the international development teams.

6.7 Limitations of the thesis and recommendations for future research

The study used published literature in order to formulate research objectives, based on calls for further qualitative exploration of the phenomenon of knowledge and learning management by hotel chains, during the internationalisation process. The research question and objectives, therefore, are well formulated and reflect current research needs of in the particular field. The limitations related to the research methodology and bias are analysed in detail in chapter 3.3.2.

According to Bello and Kostova (2012), a generic issue that has been identified by different authors and involves the literature of international business, is the multidisciplinary of its theoretical base. The body of international business which formulates the basis for this thesis, is vast and also draws heavily from other areas of

business, strategy and management in general, such as organisational behaviour, human resources development or in the particular case, knowledge management and organisational learning. The same authors support that the bringing in of so many different disciplines into a single area of research may result in research touching only the surface of otherwise robust and detailed theories and not going into depth. The present study has brought in different areas of literature, namely international business and the field of the internationalisation process, knowledge management and organisational learning as well as the context of soft services, hospitality and hotel chains in particular. The literature review has examined these bodies of literature to a great detail, taking into consideration the scope of the present work as well as aim and objectives, producing the conceptual framework. The findings uncovered new areas of literature, such as intellectual capital, networks and relationships within the internationalisation process and international human resources management which are discussed later on.

The present research is just the starting point, and more studies need to be conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the micro processes involved. Future research may address the issue of management motivation and attitudes towards knowledge management and learning processes, during the internationalisation process of hotel chains. This is something that has been researched within the literature of international business, but not in great detail when it comes to a hotel chain context. Another interesting topic that could follow up the present study, is to provide a better understanding of the value of social or intellectual capital and its role in the same processes, during the international expansion of hotel chains. An interesting finding of the research is the identification of horizontal networks or relations with competitors, as sources capable of holding and facilitating the transfer of explicit knowledge, and to a certain extent, tacit knowledge relating to the international expansion process. Further qualitative investigation into these networks would provide further insights into their nature, their value as knowledge transfer sources and the also the business ethics behind formulating and maintaining such relationships. Finally, the present thesis could formulate the basis for a quantitative study, that will measure the effect of the different constructs that can be extracted from it. For example, measuring the impact that

different managerial attitudes have, on different aspects of knowledge and learning management, such as knowledge acquisition, storage, transfer and re-use, during international expansion.

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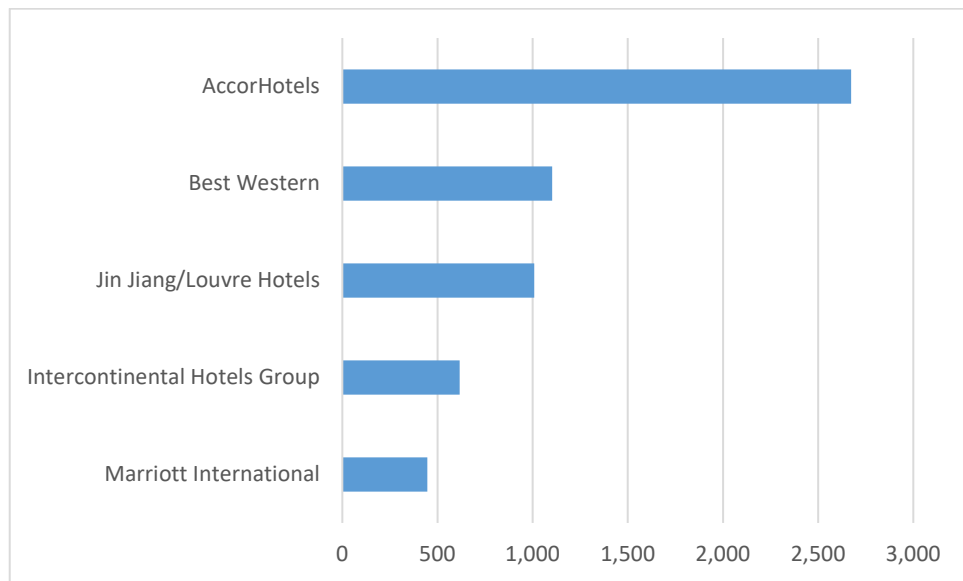
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Appendix 1: Leading hotel chains within the EU (2018)



Source: Statista (2021)

Appendix 2: Participant consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: "Knowledge management and learning during the internationalization process of hotel chains"

Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies

- | | YES | NO |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Participant's Name (Printed):

Contact details:

Researcher's Name (Printed): Michail Papaioannou

Researcher's Signature: *Michail Papaioannou*

Researcher's contact details:

Michail Papaioannou, Sheffield Hallam University, City Campus, Howard Street, Sheffield, S1 1 WB, UK

Direct line: +44 (0)114 2252948

email: m.papaioannou@shu.ac.uk

Please keep your copy of the consent form and the information sheet together.

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1. Title of Project: *Knowledge management and learning during the internationalization process of hotel chains.*
2. Opening statement
I would be grateful if you could support me in my PhD research by allowing me to interview you, in order to collect data that will support me in building an understanding of the process of knowledge management and learning during the internationalisation process of hotel chains.
3. Why have you asked me to take part?
Hotel chain development managers
You were chosen because of your position in the company. You work within the department dealing with chain internationalisation.
4. What will I be required to do?
You will be asked to answer a number of questions in relation to the internationalisation process and the learning and knowledge management mechanisms behind it. You will also be asked some questions on your personal experiences with handling knowledge gained during these projects.
5. Where will this take place?
The interview can take place at your office or workplace in general, or a nearby café or restaurant depending on your personal choice and convenience. Alternatively, the interview can also take place online via videoconferencing (Zoom, Teams, Skype).
6. How often will I have to take part, and for how long?
The interview will take place once for approximately an hour. There might be some follow-up questions that could be sent to you via email or discuss them over the phone.
7. When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation? [Debriefing]
You will have the opportunity to discuss your participation prior to the interview. You can discuss it with the researcher (Michail Papaioannou) in advance, via telephone or email or on the day of the interview.
8. Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over?
The researcher (Michail Papaioannou) will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over. It will be kept encrypted in an electronic file at Sheffield Hallam University, only for the duration of the project.
9. Who will have access to it?
No one apart from the researcher (Michail Papaioannou)
10. What will happen to the information when this study is over? [How long will raw data be kept for? Will it be passed on to other people or used in other studies?]
The data will be kept for two more years after the completion of the PhD study. It will not be passed to any other people and will be destroyed straight after that.
11. How will you use what you find out?

All data will be used towards the completion of a PhD award and will be published in the form of conference papers or journal articles, as well as the finalised copy of the PhD. All data used will be anonymous and will be non-attributable to individuals or organisations.

12. Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported? [Statement of confidentiality, details of coding system to protect identity]
No. The research is confidential, and all responses will be treated as such. The name of the company as well as your name, will not be included in the research and a coding system to protect your identity will be used. The hotel chains will be coded as Hotel Chain 1,2,3, etc. and the participants as Development Director 1,2,3, etc or Head of International Development 1,2,3, etc.
13. How long is the whole study likely to last?
The study will last at least five years (completion of part time PhD award)
14. How can I find out about the results of the study?
The results of the study will be made known to you upon completion of the PhD. A copy of the PhD will be forwarded to you.
15. What if I do not wish to take part?
Participation is totally voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, please let the researcher know.
16. What if I change my mind during the study?
You are free to withdraw at any time. You can also withdraw, after providing information, by contacting the researcher.
17. Do you have any other questions?
If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher (Michail Papaioannou)
18. Details of who to contact with any concerns or if adverse effects occur after the study.
If you have any further concerns, please contact the researcher (Michail Papaioannou)

Appendix 4: Interview questions, research objectives and related literature (Before the pilot interview)

Objective 1	<i>To understand how hotel chains, and their management development teams, capture, store, share/transfer and re-use knowledge obtained during foreign operations.</i>
Objective 2	<i>To identify the type of knowledge that is useful for hotel chains during internationalisation.</i>
Objective 3	<i>To understand the role of networks within the knowledge transfer process during internationalisation.</i>

QUESTIONS	OBJECTIVE	LITERATURE
1. What is your current position within this company?	Confirmatory question/ Ice breaker	
2. Does your role involve international expansion?	Confirmatory question/ Ice breaker	Importance of roles within the international development teams Altinay, (2005); Altinay & Roper (2001)
3. How long have you been with the hotel chain you currently work for?	Confirmatory question/ Ice breaker & Objective 2 (experience)	Experiential knowledge within internationalisation Hadley & Wilson (2003); Petersen et al. (2003)
4. What was your most recent international project?	1	KM and organisational learning processes Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016); Chandler & Lyon (2009); Ingram & Baum (1997) KM, learning and internationalisation of services Babinska (2013); Brock & Yaniv (2007); Chetty & Campbell-Hunt (2003); Garcia-Almeida & Yu (2015); Lindsay et. al. (2003); Littlejohn et al. (2007)
5. What made you look into the particular new market?	2	Knowledge acquisition and sources of knowledge Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016); Babinska (2013); Chandler & Lyon (2009); Eriksson et al. (1997); Dau (2015); Fletcher & Harris (2012)
6. What are the things you need to be aware of when expanding into a new market?	2	Useful knowledge when internationalising Babinska (2013); Eriksson et al. (1997); Fletcher & Harris (2012)
7. What are the risks when expanding into a new market?	2	Influence of cultural distance on internationalisation Gemar (2014); Leon-Darder & Villar-Garcia (2011); Quer et al. (2007); Pla-Barber et al. (2011); Rodriguez et al. (2010)

8. Do you feel that your experience, from expanding into other markets, can play a role when dealing with new projects?	2	Role of prior knowledge/ experience when internationalising Altinay & Wang (2006); Brookes & Altinay (2017); Eriksson et al. (2015); Gross et al. (2017); Hadley & Wilson (2003); Michailova & Wilson (2008); Pla-Barber et al. (2014).
9. Do you somehow keep a record of your experiences, when you complete an international expansion project?	1	Storing knowledge Huber (1991); Dixon (1992); Kogut & Zander (1993, 1992); Olivera (2000); Oviatt & McDougall (2005)
10. If you do keep a record of the details of your expansion into another market, how do you file it/ store it?	1	Storing knowledge & intellectual capital Engstrom et al. (2003); Huber (1991); Dixon (1992); Kogut & Zander (1993, 1992); Olivera (2000); Oviatt & McDougall (2005)
11. How do you share your on-the-field experiences with the rest of your team or other colleagues?	1	Knowledge transfer/ sharing Aizpurua et al. (2011); Garcia-Almeida & Yu (2015); Ingram & Baum (1997); Kyriakidou & Gore (2005); Lindsay et al. (2003); Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995); Scott & Ding (2008); Seely-Brown (1993); Yang, (2007); Yang & Wan (2004)
12. Does your experience in previous markets, assist you with new expansion projects to different markets?	1	Knowledge re-use and replication Brock & Yaniv (2007); Eriksson et al. (2015); Fletcher & Harris (2013); Johanson & Vahlne (1977)
13. How do you feel experience influences the speed that an international expansion project can be completed?	1 & 2	Experiential knowledge and time of completion Sharma & Blomstermo (2003); Petersen et al. (2003); Rodriguez, et al. (2010)
14. How do you feel experience influences the costs of international expansion projects?	2	Experiential knowledge and costs of international projects Eriksson et al. (2015); Johanson & Vahlne (1990); Rodriguez, et al. (2010); Scott-Kennel & Batenburg (2012)
15. Could your hotel chain do more with the knowledge that you developed over time?	1	
16. How do you protect the knowledge that exists within your hotel chain?	1	Intellectual capital in hotels or in relation to internationalisation Bontis et al. (2015); Engstrom et al. (2003); Lindsay et al. (2003); Rudez & Mihalic (2007)
17. How do you protect the knowledge that exists within your hotel chain?	1	Intellectual property Autio & Acs (2010); Hurmelinna-Laukkanen (2012)

Appendix 5: Final interview questions, research objectives and related literature

Objective 1	<i>To understand how hotel chains, and their management development teams, capture, store, share/transfer and re-use knowledge obtained during foreign operations.</i>
Objective 2	<i>To identify the type of knowledge that is useful for hotel chains during internationalisation.</i>
Objective 3	<i>To understand the role of networks within the knowledge transfer process during internationalisation.</i>

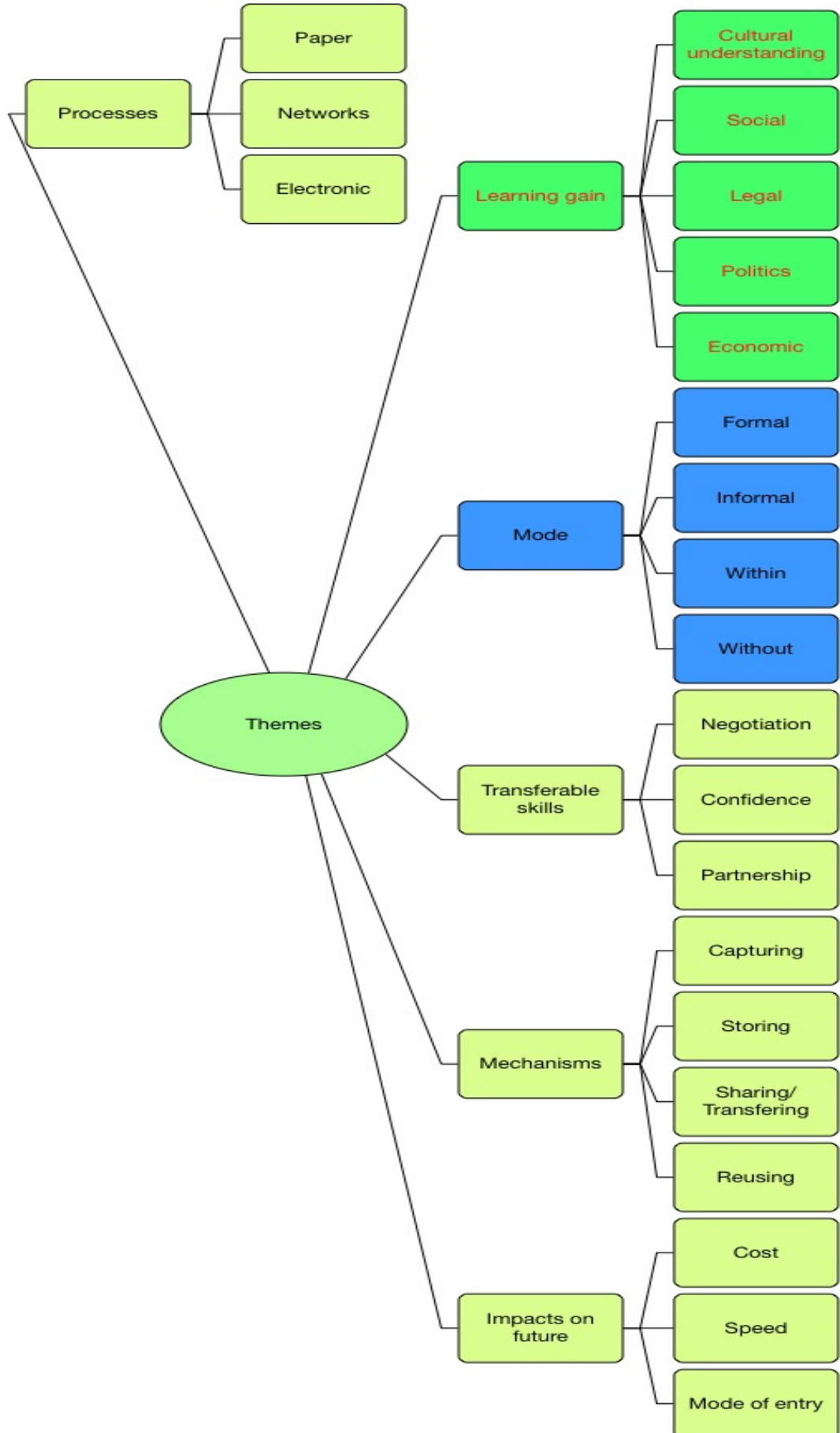
QUESTIONS	OBJECTIVE	LITERATURE
1. What is your current position within this company?	Confirmatory question/ Ice breaker	
2. Does your role involve international expansion? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are your duties and responsibilities within this capacity 	Confirmatory question/ Ice breaker	Importance of roles within the international development teams Altinay, (2005); Altinay & Roper (2001); De Correia et al. (2019)
3. How long have you been with the hotel chain you currently work for? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long have you worked for, in your current capacity/role? When was your first international assignment? Many years of experience do you have. working on international projects for hotel chains? 	Confirmatory question/ Ice breaker & Objective 2 (experience)	Experiential knowledge within internationalisation Hadley & Wilson (2003); Petersen et al. (2003)
4. What was your most recent international project? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you describe the steps involved in it? 	1	KM and organisational learning processes Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016); Chandler & Lyon (2009); Ingram & Baum (1997) KM, learning and internationalisation of services Babinska (2013); Brock & Yaniv (2007); Chetty & Campbell-Hunt (2003); Garcia-Almeida & Yu (2015); Lindsay et. al. (2003); Littlejohn et al. (2007)
5. What made you look into the particular new market? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What would be the motivation for expansion? 	2	Knowledge acquisition and sources of knowledge Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016); Babinska (2013); Chandler & Lyon (2009); Dau (2015); De Correia et al., 2019; Eriksson et al. (1997); Fletcher & Harris (2012)
6. What are the things you need to be aware of when expanding into a new market? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kind of knowledge do you need in order to develop new branches in new international markets? 	2	Useful knowledge when internationalising Babinska (2013); Eriksson et al. (1997); Fletcher & Harris (2012)

<p>7. Would you consider reaching out to other colleagues in the industry for information on international expansion projects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of knowledge do you seek when communicating with colleagues in the industry? • Do you have an established network or working relationships with other professionals in the industry, including other competitor hotel chains, that you utilise as sources of knowledge and the opposite? 	<p>3</p>	<p>Role of networks as knowledge sources Chandler & Lyon (2009); Chetty & Campbell-Hunt (2004); Dau (2015); Eriksson et al. (1997); Fletcher & Ford (1980); Hadley & Wilson (2003); Harris (2012); Huber (1991); Idris & Saridakis (2018); Johanson & Mattsson (1988)</p> <p>Relationships in internationalisation Freeman et al. (2010); Harris & Wheeler (2005); Lindsay et al. (2003); Pinho & Prange (2016).</p>
<p>8. What are the risks when expanding into a new market?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of knowledge is most useful in order to minimise risks? • How are cultural differences (psychic distance) managed? • Is the level of psychic distance a factor affecting the choice of markets? 	<p>2</p>	<p>Influence of cultural distance on internationalisation Gemar (2014); Leon-Darder & Villar-Garcia (2011); Quer et al. (2007); Pla-Barber et al. (2011); Rodriguez et al. (2010); Sousa & Lengler (2009).</p>
<p>9. Do you feel that your experience, from expanding into other markets, can play a role when dealing with new projects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is experiential internationalisation knowledge important for international assignments? • How important is the knowledge that you gain through experience in your field (obtained during the internationalisation process), in terms of its usefulness for future projects? 	<p>2</p>	<p>Role of prior knowledge/experience when internationalising Altinay & Wang (2006); Brookes & Altinay (2017); Eriksson et al. (2015); Gross et al. (2017); Hadley & Wilson (2003); Michailova & Wilson (2008); Pla-Barber et al. (2014).</p>
<p>10. Do you somehow keep a record of your experiences, when you complete an international expansion project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you capture experiential internationalisation knowledge within your hotel chain? • Is there a mechanism that allows you to record your international experiences? 	<p>1</p>	<p>Storing knowledge Huber (1991); Dixon (1992); Kogut & Zander (1993, 1992); Olivera (2000); Oviatt & McDougall (2005)</p>

<p>11. If you do keep a record of the details of your expansion into another market, how do you file it/ store it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you store experiential internationalisation knowledge within your hotel chain? • Do you use a Knowledge Management system within your hotel chain? • Do all international development team member have access to those records? Do other international development teams (different regions) also have access? 	<p>1</p>	<p>Storing knowledge & intellectual capital Engstrom et al. (2003); Huber (1991); Dixon (1992); Kogut & Zander (1993, 1992); Olivera (2000); Oviatt & McDougall (2005)</p>
<p>12. How do you share your on-the-field experiences with the rest of your team or other colleagues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you transfer/ share experiential internationalisation knowledge within your team and within the company (other development managers)? For example, through annual development team meetings and sharing of experiences gained in the field or a knowledge management system. • What is the most useful way of sharing the knowledge you gain through international projects with the company? 	<p>1</p>	<p>Knowledge transfer/ sharing Aizpurua et al. (2011); Garcia-Almeida & Yu (2015); Ingram & Baum (1997); Kyriakidou & Gore (2005); Lindsay et al. (2003); Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995); Scott & Ding (2008); Seely-Brown (1993); Yang, (2007); Yang & Wan (2004)</p>
<p>13. Does your experience in previous markets, assist you with new expansion projects to different markets?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can this internationalisation knowledge be re-applied within a different context (country/ region/ continent/ etc.)? • Which part of this knowledge is useful and which not useful? 	<p>1</p>	<p>Knowledge re-use and replication Brock & Yaniv (2007); Eriksson et al. (2015); Fletcher & Harris (2013); Johanson & Vahlne (1977)</p>
<p>14. How do you feel experience influences the speed that an international expansion project can be completed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the impact that the accumulation of experiential internationalisation knowledge has on the process of hotel internationalisation in terms of speed 	<p>1 & 2</p>	<p>Experiential knowledge and time of completion Sharma & Blomstermo (2003); Petersen et al. (2003); Rodriguez, et al. (2010)</p>

<p>15. How do you feel experience influences the costs of international expansion projects?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the impact that the accumulation of experiential internationalisation knowledge has on the process of hotel internationalisation in terms of costs 	<p>2</p>	<p>Experiential knowledge and costs of international projects Eriksson et al. (2015); Johanson & Vahlne (1990); Rodriguez, et al. (2010); Scott-Kennel & Batenburg (2012)</p>
<p>16. Could your hotel chain do more with the knowledge that you developed over time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could there be more done, when it comes to utilising internationalisation related knowledge within hotel chains? 	<p>1</p>	
<p>17. How do you protect the knowledge that exists within your hotel chain?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a Development Director/ Manager, etc. was to move to a competitor, would there be any confidentiality restrictions in terms of knowledge, experiences and information? What can they take with them? 	<p>1</p>	<p>Intellectual capital in hotels or in relation to internationalisation Bontis et al. (2015); Engstrom et al. (2003); Lindsay et al. (2003); Rudez & Mihalic (2007)</p>
<p>18. How do you protect the knowledge that exists within your hotel chain?</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Intellectual property Autio & Acs (2010); Hurmelinna-Laukkanen (2012)</p>

Appendix 6: Themes & thematic coding framework



Capturing		16	136 MP	
Electronic		16	49 MP	
Other		16	71 MP	
Paper		5	5 MP	
Impact of EK		16	156 MP	
Cost	2 2 2 2 2	16	35 MP	
Mode of Entry	2 2 2 2 2	15	41 MP	
Risks	2 2 2 2 2	16	50 MP	
Speed		15	27 MP	
Individual KSA	2 2	16	339 MP	
Abilities		15	89 MP	
Skills		15	89 MP	
Useful Knowledge		16	156 MP	
Mechanisms		16	294 MP	
Capturing		16	103 MP	
Reusing		13	36 MP	
Storing		15	39 MP	
Transferring		16	114 MP	
Network form location		16	92 MP	
Within		15	66 MP	
Without		14	26 MP	
Network type		16	101 MP	
Formal		16	65 MP	
Informal		16	35 MP	
Transferring		16	138 MP	
Networks		15	40 MP	
Team Structure Processes		16	96 MP	
Useful K		16	299 MP	
Business K		16	74 MP	
Congenial K		12	33 MP	
Institutional K		16	63 MP	
Internationalisation K		16	125 MP	